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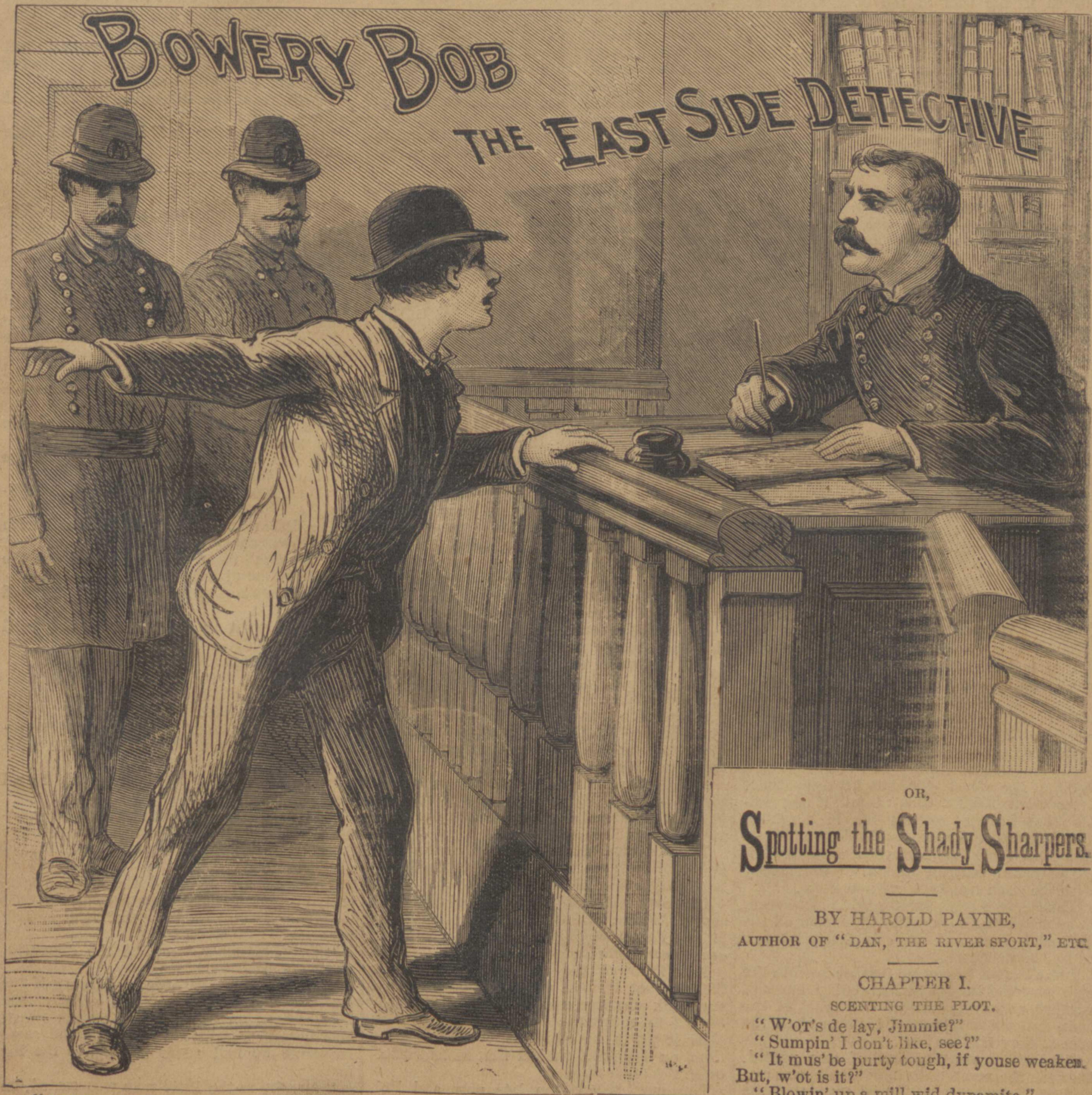
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"I HAVE SOME JAIL BIRDS CORNERED," SAID BOB, EXCITEDLY, "AND I WANT
A POSSE OF MEN."

OR,
Spotting the Shady Sharpers.

BY HAROLD PAYNE,
AUTHOR OF "DAN, THE RIVER SPORT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

SCENTING THE PLOT.

"W'ot's de lay, Jimmie?"
"Sumpin' I don't like, see?"
"It mus' be purty tough, if youse weaken.
But, w'ot is it?"
"Blowin' up a mill wid dynamite."
"Wal?"
"I don't mind doin' a job in de reg'lar

way, see? but dere's sumpin' kinder low down 'bout blowin' up innercent people jes' fer de sake o' gittin' square wid one old bloke w'ot's got a few millions stowed away, dat yourn trooly sickens at."

"Oh, youse is gittin' too 'tarnal squeemish, Jimmie. De nex' t'ing we hear yer'll be jinin' de church or signin' de temperance pledge."

"Not much, but—"

The speaker stopped short in his remarks and changed color, in spite of the grime and smut that covered his features, for he had at that instant caught sight of a pair of sharp eyes which were leveled at him.

The scene was one of the ferry-boats that ply between New York and Brooklyn, and the time a little past the hour of midnight.

Robert Gaylord, cr, as he is better known, Bowery Bob, was just returning from Brooklyn, where he had been on some private business.

On getting aboard of the ferry-boat, he had walked on through the men's cabin and out on to the bow of the boat, to get the fresh air, for the night was excessively sultry.

Moving in the cat-like manner which, from his experience as a detective, had become second nature to him, he had passed through the doors so silently that two men who stood just outside, but at one side of the doors, did not notice him.

The boat was nearly empty at this time of night, and the forecastle was entirely deserted, except for the two men in question, when Bob emerged from the cabin.

The young detective had sauntered out carelessly, not dreaming of overhearing anything of the nature of the above dialogue, and it is not to be wondered at that the first words attracted his attention.

He paused instinctively and turned his keen eyes upon the speakers, who were partly concealed in the shadow of the boat's awning, and one of them had his back toward the detective, while the other had his eyes fixed upon his companion, and thus neither of them noticed the new arrival for some seconds.

But, for some unaccountable reason, just at the point indicated above, the man addressed as Jimmie, who had his back to the detective, suddenly turned and caught sight of the vigilant eyes fixed upon him.

As the fellow turned the light fell upon his face and partially upon the rest of his body, and Bob was enabled to discern his general appearance with tolerable accuracy.

The fellow had not the appearance of a professional crook, but rather that of a workingman. His clothing was rough but fairly good, and the man's face, by no means that of a criminal, was smutted and grimed as though he had just come from some shop or factory.

Contrasting this with the man's recent remarks, the young detective was puzzled as to how to class him.

His language certainly had been that of a crook of the worst type, but his appearance did not corroborate this. Could it be possible that he was some crook in disguise? This seemed the most probable, but when Bob came to examine the face more carefully, he could scarcely reconcile the theory with the open frankness visible there.

The fellow's companion could not be seen, as he stood leaning against the locker on the side of the boat, and was completely obscured by the darkness.

Bob affected to pay no further heed to the man who had caught him watching him, and strolled carelessly toward the front of the boat, determining to keep his eyes upon the men as they left the boat.

All further conversation, if any passed, between the mysterious individuals, was carried on in such a confidential tone, that the detective could hear none of it.

They did not stir from the spot where

they were standing, however, until the boat landed, when they walked off boldly and with an unconcerned air. They affected not to notice Bob, and he had an excellent opportunity of scrutinizing them closely.

There was little to be discovered about the man whom he had already had a look at, except that he was a very large and powerfully-built man; but his companion interested the detective exceedingly.

He was a spare man, fully a head shorter than the other, and would probably weigh no more than a hundred and twenty five pounds. And, if the big man's dialect and the subject of his conversation had belied his looks, it was decidedly so in this man's case. He was well-dressed, wore a tawny pointed beard, and in every other respect bore the appearance of an eminently respectable man.

Bob was more mystified than ever.

And another thing that puzzled him was the fact that while the little conversation he had overheard from them indicated that they were crooks, it also showed that whatever job the big man was engaged in, the little one was apparently a stranger to it.

It would also appear that they had just met at the time of Bob's emergence from the cabin, for, it will be remembered, the small man asked the large one what he was engaged in.

Bob's mind was busy with these thoughts as he passed off the boat and loitered at a distance behind the two men.

He strove persistently to overhear what they were saying, but, evidently profiting by the lesson they had received on the boat, they spoke in such a confidential tone that he could catch none of it.

The boat had landed its passengers at the foot of Catherine street, and the two men took one of the streets leading up toward Chatham Square.

Bob still continued in their wake, still vainly striving to catch something of their conversation.

At Chatham Square they stopped and conversed a moment in the same low tone, and as Bob crossed the street behind them and walked past them in the hope of hearing something, they both turned and looked him over from head to foot.

The detective, who walked on with an unconcerned air, affected to notice nothing of this, and then one of them made some remark which Bob did not catch, to which the other replied with a sneer:

"Naw! Too young. No fear o' him."

This Bob inferred referred to him, and he guessed that the man who had spoken first had insinuated that he was a detective, while the other scouted the idea.

But the worst of it was, he could not tell which man had spoken first, or which one had spoken last.

Bob took a turn around the flat-iron block bounded by Chatham, Mulberry and Catherine streets and came upon the men from an opposite direction.

But just as he came in sight of them they shook hands and parted, the large man going in the direction of the Bowery and the other down Chatham street.

The detective was undecided as to which one to follow, as he desired to follow one, but finally chose the large man.

He slouched along for the distance of several blocks, and at length turned into one of the cheap lodging houses to be found at every few doors along the Bowery.

Bob followed the fellow up-stairs, but finding that he had engaged a cheap room and took the key and departed, as if he intended to retire, the detective did not consider it worth his while to waste any more time on him, and wished that he had shadowed the other man.

However, it was too late now, and Bob concluded the only thing to do was to go home.

Mulberry street is now a very inviting place in which to reside, but it was convenient for Bob's purposes, and for that reason he had a room, which he used for the double purpose of office and occasional sleeping-room, in that street.

Owing to the lateness of the hour and the fact that he would have some business to attend to early the following morning in this vicinity, he went to this room in Mulberry street, intending to stay there for the night.

The room was on the third floor of one of the tumble-down houses of the neighborhood, and the approach to it was by three flights of very narrow, dark and dirty stairs. And for this reason, as well as the undesirability of the locality, visitors were rare, and what few he had were principally some of the *attaches* of the police force.

Bob was not a little surprised, therefore, when, a few minutes after he got into the room, a rap came at the door.

But his greatest surprise was when he opened the door and found who the caller was, for it was none other than the little man whom the detective had shadowed from Catherine Ferry.

And the visitor appeared no less surprised than himself, for he stood staring at Bob for several seconds without uttering a word.

"Well," said the detective, "what can I do for you, sir?"

"Is the detective in?" inquired the little man with a scared look.

CHAPTER II.

AN ALMOST INCREDIBLE STORY.

THE detective looked the visitor over quickly, and then replied:

"Yes. What do you want?"

"I want to see the detective," answered the little man promptly and with a show of impatience.

"Well, step inside," said Bob, holding the door open for him.

The little man hesitated a moment, looked about uneasily, and then stepped inside with a quick, nervous step.

Once within, he stared about the single room wonderingly and finally asked:

"Where is the detective? I want to see the detective."

"Well, look at him," rejoined Bob smiling.

The little man did look at him, and with the greatest astonishment.

"You don't mean to tell me you are the detective!" he ejaculated at last.

"I sometimes pass for one," laughed Bob.

"But I want to see the man they call Bowery Bob."

"That is what they call me sometimes."

"What, you?" screeched the little man.

"Yes," was the cool rejoinder.

"But you're only a boy."

"I can't help that," returned Bob, laughing. "I'll be older by and by. But what do you want to see me about?"

"Why—if you're sure you're the man I want—"

"If you have any doubt about the matter, and it is of sufficient importance, my friend, I'll go home and get the certificate of my birth."

"The fact is," resumed the other, apparently becoming convinced at length, "there's—there's—shan't we sit down? It makes me nervous to stand."

"Why, certainly," replied the detective, placing a chair for him.

All this time Bob was wondering if the fellow recognized him as the same person he had seen on the boat and on the street, also how it was he did not use the same language he had while talking to the big man.

"As soon as the little man was seated, he began:

"I am also a detective—a private detec-

tive. I am employed by the owners of a large factory over in Brooklyn, and I have just made a terrible discovery."

"Indeed?" responded Bob.

"Yes, I have discovered there is a plot on foot to blow the factory up!"

"Have you discovered who the conspirators are?" inquired Bob, indifferently, for he did not believe one word the fellow was saying.

"No. That is just the trouble."

"Do you suspect any one?"

"I have a vague theory that it is some men who were discharged some time ago, but there is nothing certain about it."

"Do you know where to locate these men?"

"Yes, I can put my hands on every one of them."

"What evidence have you that they are the guilty parties?"

"As I say, it is only a theory that they are the parties. Still, I have pretty good reason for believing in it."

"Well, what is your reason for believing that they are the ones?"

"I have overheard some of them making threats."

"That is pretty good to begin with. But have you any reason to believe that they or anybody else have any serious intentions in that direction?"

"Oh, I know that an attempt is to be made."

"How do you know this?"

"We have discovered a box containing dynamite in the basement of the building."

"That seems pretty conclusive," observed the detective, becoming interested. "But as you have discovered the explosive and, no doubt, removed it, there remains but little for you to do but watch the premises and see that they do not place any more there."

"I understand we can do that all right, but the trouble is, that we fear that there are traitors on the inside, even among the watchmen, and therefore we are in greater peril than if we had no watchman at all."

"What is the matter with discharging all the watchmen and getting an entirely fresh lot?"

"That would do no good, as we are just as apt to get men who have been approached and 'fixed' by the conspirators."

"What do you propose to do, then?"

"My idea is to get some good detective—and I have been recommended to come to you—to ferret the thing out, find out who the conspirators are and arrest them. In other words, it will be necessary to break up the gang before we can hope for safety."

"And you would like me to take hold of the case?"

"I would."

"Can you give me any clue upon which to start?"

"None, except to tell where to find these men who have been discharged."

"Very well, give me that."

The little man arose, walked to the little writing-desk, sat down and wrote the names and addresses of about a dozen men on a slip of paper, which he handed to the detective.

Bob glanced over the paper, and murmured:

"All in Brooklyn, eh?"

"Yes, they all live close to the factory."

Bob was on the point of asking him for an explanation of the scene on the ferry-boat, but changed his mind, and asked instead:

"What shape was the explosive in when you found it?"

"It was in an ordinary grocer's box," was the answer.

"Have you preserved the box?"

"I think it is somewhere about the factory."

"Please save it and let me have it. By

the way, did you notice where the box came from—what grocer?"

"No. As well as I remembered, it had contained canned goods and had no other mark upon it than the label of the packers of the goods."

"Let me see," mused Bob, after a little of reflection, "you haven't told me your name yet, I believe?"

"Oh, I beg a thousand pardons!" cried the little man, greatly confused. "Certainly not. I had forgotten all about that. My name is Nathan Headly, sir. Here is my card."

Bob took the card, glanced at it carelessly, and put it into his pocket.

"Would it be convenient for us to go over there to-night, Mr. Headly?" he asked.

"To-night?" gasped the other, in great astonishment. "Why to-night?"

"I simply asked you if it would be convenient for us to go over to-night," rejoined the detective, eying his man sharply.

"Oh, I suppose we could go over to-night," muttered the little man; "but, what is the use of it?"

"I should say that, if there is a possibility of the factory being blown up, and you desire to prevent it, it is very important that we should set to work upon the case as soon as possible. For aught we know, they may accomplish their purpose this very night."

The little man turned pale.

"So soon?" he gasped.

"Of course, I know nothing about it," interjected Bob. "But judging by what you have told me, I should not be surprised if they carried out their plot at any time. But that is not the question. Will you, or will you not, go over with me?"

Headly hesitated a moment, and then stammered:

"I—I—would prefer not going to-night."

"When can you go?"

"In the morning—as early in the morning as you like, but not to-night."

"Very well, then, will you give me a letter of introduction to the watchman, so that I may go alone? Of course, he mustn't know that I am a detective. Introduce me as a friend of yours or of the proprietor, or whatever you think best."

"I do not think the plan would work," said the little man, after reflecting a good while. "You see, the men are down on the proprietor—that is their reason for wanting to blow the place up—and they are equally bitter against me. So you will either have to wait till morning, or go without a letter of introduction."

"Very well, I'll manage it. But, what is the proprietor's name, and where does he live?"

"His name is Ezekiel Masterson, and he lives in Flatbush."

"That will do."

"Shall you go out to-night?" questioned the other, eagerly.

Bob consulted his watch.

"It is now after two; it is likely that I shall not. What time will you come here for me in the morning?"

"As early as you say."

"Say six o'clock."

Headly looked astonished.

"Why so early?" he asked.

"I want to get there before any of the men do."

CHAPTER III.

A DISCOVERY.

BOWERY BOB sat thinking for some time after the mysterious stranger took his leave.

That there was any great amount of truth in what he had told he did not believe, but what could have been the man's motive for coming to him with the story?

Perhaps it would have been better to have asked him to explain the scene on the ferry-boat, after all.

But the best way to find out whether there was any truth in the story would be to carry out his first resolution, which was to go over to the factory in Brooklyn and learn what he could there.

So, late as it was, the young detective adopted his favorite disguise, that of an East-side young tough, and made his way back across the river.

The factory was near the foot of Adams street, Brooklyn, and he had not far to go after getting off the Catherine street ferry.

The night was extremely dark, and the great factory building loomed black and grim against the sky.

Everything was quiet in the vicinity, but as the detective approached the building he caught a glimpse of a man standing at one corner.

Slouching along carelessly, he soon came up with the man.

"Good-evenin'," said Bob.

"More like mornin'," growled the other.

"So it is, old feller," chuckled the detective. "Dat's one on yourn trooly. Kinder lonesome guardin' de old shed dis time o' night, ain't it?"

"Kinder. But who're you? Not Jimmie?"

"Nope, but er fr'en' of Chimmie's."

"Yer don't say?" cried the watchman, as Bob now knew the fellow to be. "Not Danny Mullen, I've heard 'im tellin' so much 'bout?"

"I'm de covey."

"Wal, den, ye'r me fr'en', too," declared the watchman, extending his hand. "Anybody w'ot's Jimmie's fr'en' is me friend."

"Glad ter know yer, Mat. By de way, is de boys a-goin' ter do any'ting to-night?"

"I dunno. Dey 'tended ter, but I guess dey ain't heered nuttin' f'um Oakman yit. Yer know he has de say, as he's puttin' up de stuff fer de job."

"Chimmie didn't say nuttin' 'bout dat," interposed the detective, wondering who Oakman was. And then making a bold strike, he said:

"He didn't even tell me who Oakman was."

"W'y, youse knows who Oakman is, don't yer?" queried the other, a little suspiciously.

"I swear I don't," avowed Bob.

"W'y, he's de cove w'ot's puttin' up de dust fer de job."

"Oh!"

The detective knew just as much as he did before. And what was worse, he saw that any further questioning would only serve to increase the other's suspicion, which he feared had already been aroused.

He was silent for some moments, meanwhile considering in his mind what would be the best course to pursue.

At length an idea occurred to him.

"Wal," he grumbled, "if dey ain't goin' ter be nuttin' goin' on, I'll jes' take a skip. Chimmie t'ought dere would be."

"He ought to know," replied the watchman sullenly. "He's de head pusher, outside o' Oakman. It's a wonder he ain't round."

"D'y'e think he'll be round?"

"Sure."

As the fellow spoke the outline of a slouching figure was seen approaching from the further end of the building.

The watchman turned and gazed in the direction for a moment or two, and then growled:

"Dat's him now, I guess."

Bob was in a quandary what to do.

He had not counted on the fellow coming so soon, if at all, and the detective was at a loss how to avoid him, for it would not do to meet him.

Meanwhile the big ruffian was approaching. It would not do to run, and the detective finally decided to stand his ground and trust to luck.

Jimmie came on up and, apparently not seeing Bob, addressed himself to the watchman.

"Hullo, Tom!" he said. "Any o' de boys been round yit?"

"On'y one," replied the other, jerking his head in the direction of the detective.

"Which one's dat?" inquired Jimmie.

"I forgit w'ot his name is. He says he's a friend o' yours."

"Where is he?" growled the big fellow.

"Right here," replied the watchman, again indicating the detective with a nod.

The big man turned and looked toward Bob, but, fortunately for that young man, it was too dark for him to see what he looked like.

"Who're you?" he finally asked in a suspicious tone. "'Tain't Dave, I don't reckon."

Bob resolved upon a desperate venture. It was risky, but the only alternative. He trusted that the watchman would not remember the other name he had given.

"Dat's w'ere yer hit it, Chimmie," he answered. "Yer never guessed better in yer life, see?"

Jimmie again peered at him in the darkness, vainly striving to discern his features, and appeared to be satisfied that it was all right, for he said:

"Where's de udder fellers?"

"I dunno," was Bob's prompt response, although he knew no more who was meant than the man in the moon.

"Didn't dey say dey was comin'?"

"Sure."

"How is it dey didn't come wid youse?"

"Dey stopped in er saloon, an', as I wasn't takin' anyting, I come on, t'inking dey'd be right erlong."

So far he had hit the mark so well that the ruffian did not suspect that he was any other than the person he represented himself, and after a little reflection, the big fellow said:

"Wal, I reckon me an' you kin do de work if dey don't come. Anyway, I reckon dey'll be comin' long purty soon. Come on."

With that the big man turned and walked back in the direction he had come, and Bob followed him.

When they reached the opposite end of the mill the leader stopped and appeared to reflect. Then walking back to where he had left the watchman standing, held a conference with him.

On rejoining Bob again, Jimmie said:

"I t'ought I'd better tell de watchman to tell de boys if dey come to come on down."

And then turned and went down a flight of area steps and proceeded to unlock a door leading into the basement of the building.

Bob followed him, and when they were inside, the big man struck a match and lit a bit of candle which he had taken from somewhere.

By its dim, uncertain light Bob saw that they were in a narrow passage, and the man proceeded along this for some distance without looking behind him.

At length he came to a heavy iron door on one side of the passage, opened it and passed through.

Still he had not looked back, and pressed on straight ahead through the dark cellar, lighted only by the meager dip.

Finally he came to a pile of boxes, and taking up one of the smallest of them, proceeded on his way for some distance further.

He arrived at last at what appeared to be about the middle of the building. An immense square mass of masonry extended from the ground to the floor above, and was evidently placed there to support the weight of the structure. Some of the stones had been removed, leaving a hole a foot square and two or three feet deep in the massive pillar.

Into this hole the big man thrust the box a short distance. He then picked up a wire which was lying on the ground and fastened the end of it in a small hole there was in the box, after which he pushed the box still further into the opening in the masonry.

All this strange proceeding the detective watched with intense interest, and, realizing that the box doubtless contained dynamite, an unpleasant shudder ran over him at the thought of the result of the concussion of the electric current which would be turned on the wire from somewhere on the outside. And when he thought, a moment later, of the possibility of there being any mistake in the arrangements, and the outside turning on the current while he was still in the basement, the young detective's hair almost raised on end.

But while this was passing through his mind he had neglected to notice the movements of the big man for an instant, and when he looked in his direction again, Bob was startled at seeing the big man standing in front of him holding the candle close to his face and staring at him with a dark scowl.

"I t'ought I wasn't mistaken in dat voice," he growled, "an' now dat I see de mug of yer, I know I ain't. Ye'r de same covey w'ot I seen on de ferry, an' ye'r a detective, or I miss my guess!"

Bob was transfixed for the instant, but not too much agitated to wonder where the fellow had heard his voice before.

CHAPTER IV.

A TERRIBLE THREAT.

It did not take Bob more than a few seconds to recover his presence of mind, and the next instant he had his revolver out and leveled at the big ruffian.

"Yes," he grinned, "you struck it that time, old fellow, and now in consideration of your discovery I shall ask you to take a walk with me."

The big fellow was taken off his guard and the appearance of the shining barrel of the revolver in the close proximity of his face exercised a strange effect upon him.

His dirty face grew pale and his teeth began to chatter with abject terror.

"W'ot d'ye mean?" he gasped, in a trembling voice.

"I mean that you are my prisoner," rejoined Bob, coolly.

"W'ot for?"

"It's no use of multiplying words," returned Bob, sternly. "You know as well as I do what I want you for. And as I have had the rare fortune of catching you in the very act of committing this devilish crime, I shall have little difficulty in convicting you."

The big fellow made a move and, the detective thinking that he was about to attempt to escape, shoved the weapon still closer into his face, with the admonition:

"Don't try any of your funny work with me, Jimmie! I'm dead on to your trickery."

He was surprised at that moment to see the big fellow's features undergo a sudden change. From a look of terror he suddenly began to grin, and then Bob noticed that he was looking over his head at some object behind him.

At almost the same instant the detective heard footsteps behind him, and, stealing a quick glance in the direction, was horrified to catch a glimpse of the dark outlines of four men approaching from the direction he and his guide had come!

Bob saw at once that he was in for it, but he did not for a moment lose his presence of mind.

After glancing about at the big man again to ascertain what attitude he had assumed, and seeing that he was preparing for attack, the young detective made a quick jump to

one side so as to place both parties in front of him, and, drawing another revolver, leveled the two upon his enemies.

The fresh arrivals were instantly panic-stricken, not knowing the meaning of the situation, and drew back.

But the leader, seeing their inclination to waver, thundered out at them:

"Stand yer ground, fellers! W'ot yer runnin' from one man fer? Draw yer guns an' let 'im have it!"

"Don't do it!" cried Bob, savagely. "The first one that draws a gun is a dead man!"

This had the effect of increasing their panic, and so far from showing any inclination to obey their leader's command, the four men showed a very strong desire to run.

This infuriated the big fellow more than ever, and he yelled at the top of his voice:

"Draw yer guns, I tell yer! W'ot's de matter wid yer? Air yer afeared o' one-bloke like dat? Draw yer guns, I tell yer!"

"You'd better take my advice, and not do it," repeated Bob, with the utmost coolness, "unless some of you want to die in about a second."

The big man was worked up to a perfect fury by this time.

"Cowards!" he yelled. "I've a notion to shoot every mother's son of yer myself! Draw yer guns, like me! See, I'm not afeared o' the cussed beak!"

With that he attempted to draw his revolver, but the instant he put his hand behind him, Bob took deliberate aim and fired, not at the man, but at the candle he held in his hand.

The next instant the place was in total darkness.

Instantly there was the greatest confusion among the crowd of ruffians.

"Strike er light!" yelled Jimmie. "Quick!"

Meanwhile the detective had taken care to change his position, in order that, in the event of their taking it into their heads to fire upon him, they would not know where to locate him.

He could easily tell by the shuffling of their feet where the men were, and, taking advantage of the knowledge, managed to creep toward the door without their being the wiser.

Groping along cautiously, Bob finally reached the door, and here he paused to await developments.

Guided by the hum of excited voices, he could easily have done excellent execution by firing at the sound, for, as the men were naturally huddled together, he could hardly have failed hitting some of them.

But, he considered that the proceeding would have savored of cowardice. Besides, he knew that, if they attempted to strike a light, they would only make targets of themselves.

At length he saw some one strike a match, and the very instant it flashed up he fired at the hand which held it, and the next instant the light vanished and a shriek of pain rung through the basement.

Then came a season of the wildest excitement.

The men realized the peril they were in at the hands of the detective, and that it would be fatal for them to attempt to create a light.

"Now, my good fellows," called out Bob, "I'll just fasten you in here and go outside and turn on the current of electricity, which will set off that package of dynamite. I think that will settle your hash."

As soon as he spoke the detective stepped outside of the door, and he wasn't a second too soon, for he had scarcely moved from the spot from which he had spoken when there came a volley of shots that rattled like hail against the door and jambs.

Bob did not choose to return the fire, and just as the din created by the crash of fire-

arms died away, there came the sound of the slamming of a door. He had executed his threat. Fumbling about in the darkness and finding the lock with a key in it, he was not long in making it fast.

Bob then left the building and, passing on the side toward which he had noticed the wire ran, he shot the slide of his lantern and proceeded to search for the wire.

But whether it ran outside of the building or not, it was not to be found.

At length he abandoned the search and walked round to the other side of the building where the watchman was.

He was still patrolling in front of the main entrance of the mill, and as soon as Bob came up the watchman seemed to recognize him, dark as it was, for he asked:

"How soon air yer goin' ter be ready?"

"Very soon now," replied Bob.

"Cause," pursued the other, "I want ter be a long way from here when it goes off."

"You'll be far enough away, my friend," returned Bob, pushing the muzzle of his revolver into the fellow's face. "In my opinion you'll be safe from all explosions in this part of the city. But before I take you along I want you to show me where that wire runs to."

The watchman was paralyzed with terror.

"W'ot d'yer mean?" he gasped. "Yer don't mean that ye're a detective?"

"That's about the size of it," laughed Bob. "But we're wasting time. It will soon be daylight, so come along and show me where that wire runs to."

"I don't know of any wire," stammered the fellow, almost speechless with fear.

"Oh, yes you do," muttered Bob, shoving the weapon still closer to the fellow's face, "and the sooner you show it to me the better it will be for you! Come on!"

The watchman offered no further resistance and allowed himself to be marched round to the opposite side of the building.

A happy thought appeared to strike the fellow, for when they reached the other side he ventured to say, timidly:

"If de mill's blown up while I'm away by force, it's no fault o' mine."

"Never mind," muttered the detective. "You show me that wire and there will be no danger of the mill being blown up. It is not likely to be anyway, so long as those men are in there."

"What men?" gasped the watchman in a frightened voice.

"Your pals—Jimmie and the rest of them."

"Air dey in de mill?"

"Yes, they are locked in the basement, and I guess they are not very apt to set off the charge as long as they are in danger of going up with it."

"My God!" gasped the fellow. "Hadn't we better let them out?"

"What for?"

"It—it—might go off, accidently."

"Oh, well, in that case, there wouldn't be much loss outside of the mill property."

"But yer ain't goin' ter let the men perish?"

"I'll let you perish," growled Bob, "if you don't hurry and show me where that wire is!"

CHAPTER V.

AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF AFFAIRS.

FRIGHTENED almost out of his wits, the watchman set about hunting, or pretended to hunt for the wire connected with the deadly charge of dynamite.

But it soon became evident that he either did not know where to find it or did not want to find it, and Bob became convinced ere long that the fellow was maneuvering to kill time for some purpose.

This gave him a certain sense of uneasiness, and he determined to hasten the man's

actions, if such a thing were possible, so, placing the revolver close to his head, he ordered in a stern voice:

"Now you hurry and find that wire, or I'll give you a dose of this."

"But I can't find it," muttered the other in a scared voice: "I dunno where to look."

"But you knew there was a wire?"

"I hope I may die if I did, sir!" protested the watchman.

There was a ring of genuineness in the man's tone that Bob could not overlook, and he began to believe he was telling the truth.

But he did not cease urging him for all that.

Suddenly, as he moved about in the darkness, Bob tripped on something and would have fallen only for his agility.

As soon as he recovered himself, he flashed the light of his lantern down, and there, sure enough, was the wire.

So elated was the detective over his discovery, that he paid no further attention to the watchman, and taking up the wire, moved rapidly along, following up its course.

He knew by the feeling of the wire that it was insulated, and it was simply trailed along the ground.

Still following its course, Bob crossed a court and a vacant lot, and then found that the wire ran into an old, dilapidated building.

Hurrying around to the front of the building, he saw that there was a light inside, although the shutters were closed and only a few stray rays stole through.

The door was but a few inches above the sidewalk, and a thin, frail door was all that stood in his way. Bob stole up to the door, and putting his ear close to it, listened.

There was the sound of voices as of some persons in earnest conversation.

He rapped lightly at the door, and the talking ceased. And then pretty soon the door was opened and a face appeared at it.

"Who's there?" was asked.

"It's me," returned Bob. "Dave—don't yer know me?"

"Oh, is that you, Dave?" inquired the voice, evidently satisfied. "Is everything in readiness?"

"Not quite," replied Bob. "Perty near, though."

"What the deuce is the matter with you fellows?" grumbled the man inside, impatiently. "How much longer is it going to take?"

"Not long now. On'y Chimmie wants youse ter come down inter de basement an' see if everyt'ing's all right."

"Wants me to come?" growled the other, in a perplexed tone.

"Dat's w'ot he said."

"I wonder what he wants with me."

"He said he wanted yer to come an' see if de 'rangement's all right."

"It's strange he doesn't know whether it is all right or not, without calling upon me."

Then came a voice from within, asking a question, the nature of which Bob could only guess from the answer of the man at the door.

"That infernal idiot wants me to come down and see if everything is all right," was the response.

Then came another incomprehensible question from within, to which the man at the door replied:

"I don't, either; but this fellow out here says he wants me to come."

And then after another buzz of words, the man at the door said:

"I guess so, too." And then turning to Bob, he continued:

"You go back and tell Jimmie it is all right. We are willing to trust him with that part of it."

Bob was in a quandary, but he soon discovered a way out.

"No, I can't go back dere," he muttered in a voice of simulated fear, "'cause Chimmie'll kill me if I do."

"What will he do that for?" snarled the other.

"'Cause he told me to come tell yer to come down, and said if I didn't fetch yer back wid me he'd put daylight t'rough me; see?"

The fellow hesitated a moment, and then turning to the person inside, said:

"Come on, Lester, it seems that fellow will never be satisfied until we go down, and I'll be hanged if I go alone. So come on and we'll see what he wants."

At this there was a good deal of grumbling on the part of the man within, but pretty soon he made his appearance at the door, and the two started for the basement of the mill.

Fortunately for Bob it was still too dark for them to see who he was, and he darted on ahead to open the door by the time they arrived.

To Bob's surprise the watchman was nowhere to be seen, and it was evident he had made good his escape while the opportunity presented.

The detective preceded the two men into the long, dark passage, and, arriving at the door, unlocked it as noiselessly as possible.

He fully expected to find the other men there, but in this he was disappointed. All was quiet and darkness within. He could not comprehend the meaning of this.

But before he had time to give the matter much thought the two men came up with him.

"Is this the door?" asked one.

"Yes, dis is it," replied Bob, apprehensive lest the men inside, hearing the conversation, would make a break for liberty. "Walk right in, gents."

"How dark it is!" grumbled one of the men. "I wonder why they have no light."

"It's dangerous, sir," responded Bob, growing more nervous every instant. "Dey'll make er light as soon as youse git back dere."

"Well, I for one, don't care about going in there without a light," said one.

"Don't yer know a light 'u'd give yer away?" protested Bob, impatiently. "Hurry up!"

The man still hesitated, and the detective began to fear his scheme was a failure, when a happy thought came to his relief.

Getting behind the men so that they were between him and the door, he made a sudden rush against them, sending them flying through the door before they knew what was coming.

And before they had time to recover from their surprise, he had the door closed and locked on them.

"Now," he chuckled to himself, "I have them all in there together. I guess I'll go and get a squad of policemen to take them in."

Bob hurried off to the Brooklyn Police Headquarters and reported his capture.

"I have some jail-birds cornered," said Bob, excitedly, "and want a posse of men."

The sergeant, who knew the detective, furnished him with a detail of men to take care of the prisoners, and a few minute later the patrol wagon, loaded with policemen, drove up to the mill.

It was just breaking day and objects could be seen with difficulty at any distance.

The watchman was still absent from his post and everything was as quiet as the grave about the place.

This was a surprise to the detective and the policemen, for, after what Bob had told them, they expected the men would be raising a terrific noise in attempting to make their escape.

As Bob, followed by the squad, proceeded once more along the passage, he listened

in vain for some sound of life. There was not a sound of any kind.

Nevertheless, when he reached the iron door, he called to the policemen to prepare for a fight, and each man drew his revolver.

"We ought to have a light," grumbled the sergeant.

"It would be rather dangerous," suggested Bob.

"How so?" asked the officer.

"It is dark within, and if we have a light we only make targets of ourselves."

The officer could not fail seeing the force of his logic, and remained silent.

Bob unbolted the door and threw it open.

The men were somewhat dismayed when they found that only darkness confronted them.

A breathless silence ensued for a few seconds, and every one appeared to be listening intently.

Finally the sergeant said:

"There's no use of going in there to-night. If there is anybody in there it would be suicidal. We'll guard the place till daylight and then reconnoiter."

Bob considered that as good a plan as any, and, leaving the men to guard the place, hastened back to his lodgings for the purpose of altering his disguise, preparatory to making a trip to Flatbush.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW PHASE OF THE CASE.

It was only a little after sunrise when Bob got back to Brooklyn, and before proceeding on his way to Flatbush he concluded to stop and see how the police whom he had left in charge of the mill were coming on.

He found that they had made no move since he left, and he suggested the advisability of going inside and investigating.

"It is light enough now to proceed," he argued. "In fact, as light in there as it will ever be, and we may as well see what has become of those rascals."

"They are certainly inside, if you locked them in," ventured the sergeant.

"I begin to fear not," said Bob.

"Why?" queried the officer.

"They are too quiet. They are not the kind of men to keep quiet when locked up."

"You don't mean to insinuate that they have escaped while we have been here?" interjected the sergeant, surlily.

"Certainly not. If they have escaped, they doubtless did it while I was away."

"Oh!" responded the officer, resuming his usual cheerfulness. "I didn't know but you thought we had been remiss of duty."

"By no means, sergeant," resumed Bob, reassuringly. "I am well satisfied they could never have escaped while you were here. But if there is any other outlet from the basement besides this door those fellows would have known it and taken advantage of the fact that as soon as they found themselves locked in from this direction. But let us get inside and see whether they have escaped or not."

With that the detective unbolted and opened the door.

He then stepped quickly inside and was followed by the sergeant and two or three of the men.

It was sufficiently light in the basement to enable them to discern objects at considerable distance away, and the young detective looked about in the vain hope of seeing some of the gang he had recently locked in.

Not a living being was in sight.

But concluding that the men had concealed themselves somewhere about the place, he set to searching for them. In this he was assisted by the policemen.

But at the end of half an hour's diligent search they were compelled to confess their

inability to find any one. Nor was that the worst of it. There was no apparent way of escape.

The sergeant looked inquiringly and dismayed at the detective, and finally questioned:

"Are you sure you had them in here, Mr. Gaylord?"

"Sure? Of course I am!" returned the young man, indignantly. "There is no room for a question about it."

"Where could they have disappeared to, then?"

"That I cannot tell. But—"

At that instant he caught a glimpse of a "hoist" or dumb waiter, used for hoisting goods from the basement to the upper floors.

The car was up, indicating that it had been used since the shutting down of the mill the previous night, as it is the rule to leave these at the bottom of the shaft at the close of the day.

He walked back and was examining the contrivance eagerly, when the sergeant noticed his action and approached him.

"What is it?" asked the latter.

"I was just thinking that possibly those fellows might have made their escape in this direction," replied Bob. "You see, the hoist is usually left at the bottom when they shut down at night, and, as you see, it is up."

"Which, you think, means that they went up on it, eh?" said the policeman.

"Undoubtedly."

"But, how could they run the machine while the engine was not running?"

"That would not be very difficult. Part of them, probably, went up at a time, and the others hoisted them by pulling down on this rope. I am satisfied that is the way they effected their escape."

"But, how would they get out when they got above?"

"They would only go to the first floor, and from there they would have little difficulty in escaping."

"How do you account for the elevator being several stories higher, then?" objected the policeman.

Bob had overlooked that fact.

"You are right," he said, quickly. "I hadn't noticed that. Maybe they are still in the building. Let us make a search."

"How are you going to get up there?"

"I'll soon show you."

And grasping one of the ropes, the detective began to haul the elevator down. He soon had it at the bottom of the shaft, and, stepping onto the platform, he said:

"You come on with me, sergeant, and let the men draw us up."

The order was obeyed, and Bob and the officer were soon on the first floor above the basement.

"We may as well get off here," he suggested, "and begin our hunt with this floor. If we find nothing here we can go higher."

"And leave the men below," asked the officer.

"No, they can draw each other up, if you think best."

Bob and the sergeant then began the search for the missing miscreants, but it did not take long to convince themselves that the men were not on that floor. And then the detective concluded to examine the door before proceeding up-stairs.

The door was securely locked and the key removed.

"It is evident they did not get out that way," he mused.

Then they proceeded up-stairs and prosecuted the search in that direction, but they had not gone far before they made a discovery.

Bob opened the door of a small room, or closet, used for storing goods, and was totally dark inside, when he was surprised

to find the big man called Jimmie tucked away in there.

Bob grasped him by the collar and hauled him out, and the fellow offered no resistance, when he caught sight of the squad of policemen grouped about the door.

Giving the big fellow in charge of the police, Bob dived into the closet again and soon hauled out one of the four men whom he had seen come in at the door while he was having the controversy with Jimmie.

"Aha!" cried Bob triumphantly, "I guess we shall have you all pretty soon."

And again plunged into the dark retreat. Very soon he came out with the third man.

"Quite a nest of you in there!" he laughed, and made another dive.

And thus he kept on till he had brought the four men whom he had seen in the basement, but when he went back again he was disappointed in finding no more.

"Where are the other two?" he asked Jimmie.

"W'ot udder two?" growled the big man.

"The two men I found in the shanty over there, and who were to turn on the current of electricity to set off the charge of dynamite."

"I dunno nuttin' 'bout 'em," muttered Jimmie doggedly.

"You saw them after they came into the basement, didn't you?"

"Nope."

"Do you mean to say that you did not hear me talking to them half an hour after I locked the door on you?"

"I couldn't, 'cause we was outen dere afore dat."

"Oh, I see!" exclaimed the detective.

"You did not remain in there long after I locked you in, then?"

"Nope, no longer dan we could draw ourselves up hiar."

"What did you hope to gain by coming up-stairs?"

"We didn't know but de watchman'd be outside an' open de door fer us."

"But he was not?"

"Nope, I reckon not, 'cause he never come when we knocked on de door."

"No, I guess he wasn't there at that time, for I had him with me. But it is funny where those other fellows went. Did you hear the elevator running after you got up here?"

"Nope. Nobuddy tetched it, or we'd 'a' heard it, see?"

"Then they must have got out somehow below."

"Yer say ye had de watchman wid ye?" interposed Jimmie.

"Yes, until I found the wire."

"An' didn't 'rest him?"

"No."

"Den, melby he come back an' let 'em out."

"That is just it," exclaimed Bob, excitedly. "Who are those fellows, anyway?"

"One on 'em's Oakman an' t'other's Headly I reckon," replied the big man.

"By Jove!" ejaculated Bob. "The very fellows we are after more than anybody else. They were the instigators of this business, were they not, Jimmie?"

"De w'ot?" growled the big fellow with a puzzled expression.

"They were the leaders—the ones that got up the scheme?"

"Sure," replied Jimmie.

"Then, we must get them at all hazards."

CHAPTER VII.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS.

Bob did not consider it worth his while to search any further for the two men, and at his suggestion the prisoners were taken down stairs and placed in the patrol wagon.

While this was being attended to the detective went to the pillar where he had seen

the box of dynamite deposited, with the intention of taking it along with him.

But to his disappointment it was gone.

The men had evidently removed it.

But Bob was not satisfied, and made a thorough search of the basement for it, but to no purpose. It could not be found.

It then occurred to him that it might have been taken to the shanty where he found the two men, and he made his way there.

That the men had been there again after he lured them away was evinced by the fact that the door was locked. He knocked several times, but there being no response, he concluded there was nobody in.

He was determined to see whether they had taken the explosive there or not, however, and, throwing his weight against the door, burst it open.

He found a small room, not more than twelve feet square, and utterly devoid of furniture or anything else except a few empty boxes.

"Well," he mused, "I have given them a scare, anyway, and as I have captured the tools who were evidently hired to do the dirty work, there is great hope that it will not be long before I have the originators of the plot."

With these reflections in his mind, he took a car for Flatbush.

When he reached that point the detective inquired the way to the residence of Ezekiel Masterson, and was directed to one of the old houses, a few of which still remain there which date back to revolutionary days.

The grounds were ample and almost concealed by tangled and neglected shrubbery and trees, and everything about the place gave the impression that no one lived there.

However, when he walked across the old-fashioned porch and knocked at the door his summons was answered by a queer little old woman.

The woman was not more than four feet tall, and had a hunch back. She had a long sallow face, large slaty eyes, and when she opened her mouth she showed a set of long, fang-like yellow teeth. Added to this was a head of frowsed gray hair, which hung over her temples and even into her eyes.

After taking a brief inventory of the queer creature, Bob asked:

"Is Mr. Masterson in?"

"Yes, sir," replied the woman promptly, in a sharp, rasping voice. "Will you step in?"

The detective walked in, and found the interior of the house as uninviting as the exterior had been.

The walls of the hall into which he was ushered were black with age, and there was no carpet on the floor.

The little old woman opened a door directly off the hall, and invited the visitor to enter.

He found himself in a large room with very little furniture in it. A few cheap cane-bottom chairs, a hair-cloth lounge and a plain wooden table, comprised about all there was.

"Take a seat," said the little old woman, "and I'll call him."

With that she trotted out of the room with the gait of a little child.

As Bob seated himself in one of the uncomfortable chairs and looked about him, he could not help wondering if this was the dwelling-place of the rich mill-owner, Ezekiel Masterson, and began to speculate upon what sort of a looking man he was.

But he had not time for much speculation, for in another minute or two a little old man came bustling into the room, bowing and grinning.

Save in the matter of sex, he was the very counterpart of the little old woman.

He was very little taller, was also hunch-backed, had the same long sallow face, the same colorless eyes and the same fang-like teeth. But there was one other difference,

and that was the addition of a long grizzly beard which swept to the man's waist.

"This is Mr. Ezekiel Masterson, I presume?" said Bob, rising as the old man entered the room.

"It is," replied the other, eying the visitor curiously. "Who have I the pleasure of meeting?"

"My name is Gaylord," replied Bob.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Gaylord," returned the old man, shaking his hand cordially. "What can I do for you, Mr. Gaylord?"

"You are the owner of the mill near the foot of Adams street, Brooklyn, I believe?"

"Yes, yes, we own the factory," replied the old man, seating himself near the detective, "that is—we own it, yes. What—what—"

"Well, sir to come to the point at once," interposed Bob, "there is a plot on foot to blow it up. It would have been carried into effect last night—or this morning rather, if it had not been for me."

The old man clutched the arms of his chair convulsively and his face became a picture of terror.

"It's—it's—those villains again!" he faltered in a tremulous voice. "It's those villains!"

"You know something about it, then?" observed the detective coolly, watching the other's countenance closely.

"Yes, I ought to," mumbled the old fellow. "This is the fourth time within a year."

"Who are the parties?"

"I do not know. If I did, I should soon put them where they would do no more damage soon."

"Do you suspect no one?"

"I do, and I don't."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that there are two men whom I half suspect, but it is only from hearsay. To my face they seem to be the warmest friends I have in the world."

"What are their names?"

The old man eyed the detective curiously and a little suspiciously for some moments, and then suddenly asked:

"Look here, are you a detective?"

"Possibly I am," rejoined Bob; "but, that has nothing to do with my question."

The old fellow pursed his lips and looked up at the ceiling for a few seconds, and then mumbled in a musing tone:

"No, I don't know that it does. Well, their names are Headly and Oakman. But, as I say, it is only from hearsay that I suspect them. Personally, I know nothing against the men."

"Have they any grudge against you, so far as you know?"

"So far as I know, they have not."

"And, so far as you know, they have no reason for wanting to blow up your property?"

"No, sir."

"And yet, unless I am greatly mistaken, these are the very men who are guilty of attempting to commit this crime. At least, they were the ones concerned in it last night."

"How do you know?" demanded the old man, eagerly.

"I have very good evidence of the fact; and yet there is one very singular circumstance connected with the case, and that is, that this very man Headly furnished me with the first intimation I had of the intended crime. Have you ever done either of them an injury?"

"Never—unless you'd call furnishing them money these fifteen years an injury."

"I should hardly catalogue that under the head of injury," laughed the detective; "but, other people may have a different way of viewing it. How came you to furnish them money?"

"They are both my nephews."

"Ah, I see."

"One is the son of my half-brother and the other of my sister, both dead. Their parents died poor, and it devolved upon me to furnish them means to procure an education and to live upon."

"Are they the prospective heirs to your property?"

"They will probably come in for some of it, if they behave themselves."

"Have they ever complained because you did not give them more than you were in the habit of doing?"

"Oh, yes, they are always complaining," grumbled the old man, making a wry face.

"If I gave them the last penny they'd cry for more."

"Have you ever had any words growing out of this discontent on their part?"

"Yes, frequently."

"Were your suspicions sufficiently strong on the occasions of the previous attempts to destroy your property for you to have them arrested?"

"As I told you, it was only hearsay, and, therefore, I could not prosecute them."

"So, you never had them arrested?"

"No, sir."

"Now, sir, let me ask you one more question. What could these young men gain by carrying out this infamous design?"

"Nothing."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EVIL GENIUS.

THE thing that puzzled Bob was the cool and indifferent spirit in which the old man treated the subject of the blowing up of his valuable property.

So much so that the detective was more than half inclined several times during the interview to believe that the old fellow might be implicated in the crime himself.

So strongly was this impression forced upon him at last that he was impelled to ask:

"I presume you have your property pretty well insured, Mr. Masterson?"

And the answer to the question, which was delivered in the same unsuspecting spirit of frankness that had characterized the man's demeanor throughout, tended to allay any suspicions the young detective may had entertained with regard to the old man's guilt.

"Yes," he replied, "I always keep my property well insured. It is my only protection against such scamps as might be inclined to destroy it."

"So that you would not be much the loser in the event of its being destroyed, eh?"

"Not much," was the calm rejoinder. "Indeed, considering that some of the machinery is pretty well worn out, I don't know but I would be the gainer."

This last answer plunged the young man in deeper perplexity than ever.

It showed that the old man's apparent indifference as to the fate of the mill was genuine, and yet it did not prove that he was implicated in the crime of attempting to destroy it. On the contrary, it was doubtful if he would have been so frank about the admission if he had been guilty.

Bob decided to venture a little further in the direction before leaving the subject.

"Of course," he said, cautiously, "you would encourage no move or plot which tended to deliberately destroy the property, on that account, however?"

"Certainly not," was the ingenuous reply. "For that would constitute a crime, and I was never guilty of a crime in my life."

"But if the thing could be accomplished in such a manner that no suspicion could fall upon you?"

"It would not alter the case in the least. If I had a grudge at a man and hired an assassin to put him out of the way, I should

be as guilty of murder as though I had fired the fatal shot or struck the fatal blow with my own hand."

"You are right," rejoined the detective reflectively.

And with this final answer his last shadow of suspicion of the old man's guilt vanished.

"Where do these young men—Oakman and Headly—live?"

"That would be hard to answer," returned the other. "Sometimes they live here with me, and sometimes somewhere else."

"Where do they generally live when not with you?"

"That I do not know."

"How much of the time do they reside with you?"

"That depends upon circumstances. Sometimes they will stay here for a month, and then suddenly go away, and I won't see or hear anything of them for months."

"Do they never give any reason for going off, or tell you where they are going?"

"Never."

"How long has it been since they were here last?"

"They were here yesterday."

"Last night?"

"No, they did not come back last night."

"Do you expect them to-night?"

"I never expect them. If they decide to come, they just come, without giving me notice or warning."

"So far as you know, is the character of the young men such as to lead you to believe that they would be capable of committing such a crime as this?"

"Not of their own volition."

"You think they might be influenced, then?"

"Possibly."

"Do you know of any one who is evil-minded enough to influence them in this direction?"

"I suspect they may have. Like most men, they have their good and evil genius."

Bob was thoroughly interested now.

It looked as if he might be on the scent of a clue.

"Do you know of or suspect any one who might possibly be an evil genius?"

"Yes, I know well enough who it is," replied the old man, lowering his voice and at the same time glancing about cautiously, as if afraid the said "evil genius" might be within earshot.

"Who is it?" asked the detective, eagerly.

"Oh, I couldn't tell that," he replied, in the same confidential tone.

"But it is essential, my dear sir," urged Bob. "The success of my mission to discover the miscreants may depend upon my knowing this very fact."

"I am sorry," returned the other, firmly, "but it makes no difference, if my life depended upon it, I could not tell."

Bob was at a standstill.

It was evident he could not move the other in his resolution, no matter what he might urge, and he finally concluded to try a new tack.

"Do you know a man they call Jimmie?" he asked.

"Jimmie Farrand, I guess you mean?"

"Possibly. A large bully of a man, very illiterate, and very much of a ruffian."

The old man chuckled.

"That is the man," he admitted. "Although when you charge him with illiteracy, you make a great mistake. He is far from it."

"Judging from his language, I should say that he was extremely so."

"That is assumed for a purpose. As a matter of fact, the fellow is well educated, and can use as choice language as either you or myself."

"Then he is an out-and-out villain?"

"I do not know as you can call him that. He is a drunkard, and does some naughty things when under the influence of liquor."

"And worse when he is not under the influence," interjected the detective.

"You don't mean to say that he has had anything to do with this affair?" asked the old man, exhibiting more interest than he had thus far shown.

"I mean to say that, so far as I could see, he was at the head of it," replied Bob. "Of course, I guessed there was somebody back of him, but he appeared to be bossing the job."

"You astonish me!" cried the other, with a worried expression. "You haven't—"

"Yes, I have placed him under arrest with the rest of the gang whom I found in the mill. But the men I was most anxious to catch, and whom I now believe to have been Oakman and Headly, gave me the slip, although I had them locked in the mill."

"How did they manage to escape when you caught the others?" inquired Masterson, with more curiosity than real interest.

"That is a matter I cannot understand, although I suspect that the watchman let them out."

"How did it happen that the watchman did not let the others out?"

"That is a mystery."

"What leads you to believe the other two were Oakmen and Headly. Do you know them?"

"I know Headly, although, as a matter of fact, I did not see the two men at the time I locked them in the mill, owing to the darkness. But I thought I recognized the voice of Headly."

"Can it be possible that my suspicions have been well founded, after all?" mused the old man. "I have feared it all along, although I did not allow myself to believe it. If it is really true, it is the work of the evil genius."

"And for that reason," interposed the detective, with a last desperate effort, "you should tell me who this evil genius is."

The old man started as if he had been pricked with some sharp instrument.

He stared at Bob helplessly for a moment, and then, and it appeared to cost him a terrible effort, he answered, shaking his head, dismally:

"I cannot. As I told you before—it is impossible. You need not ask me."

Bob did not urge the point any further, being satisfied that he had made some progress in the fact of discovering that there was an "evil genius" even though he had not learned who it was.

He was about to resume the conversation, when the door opened and the little, old woman put her head in.

She glanced at the detective with a darkly scowling face, and then said:

"Ezekiel, I want to speak to you."

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER VIEW.

At the call of the little old woman Masterson arose, excused himself and left the room.

There was something in his going, as well as in the tone of the little old woman, that impressed the detective with the idea that the old man was under the control and in mortal dread of the little old woman, whom he now conceived to be the former's sister.

And the door had hardly closed upon the old man when an idea suggested itself to him.

It was that this same woman was the "evil genius" Masterson had alluded to.

The more the detective pondered the matter the more fully convinced he became that this was true.

And he began to think he had run upon the scent of a clue which would, in the natural course of things, lead to the complete unraveling of the mystery of the attempted explosion.

But he had not long to speculate when his reverie was interrupted by the return of the old man.

The latter appeared to be in a very nervous state, as though he had been engaged in an unpleasant dispute during his absence, and as soon as he entered the room he said, in a brusque tone:

"Well, young man, I guess you have got about all the information I can give you, and, as my time is precious, I must ask you to excuse me from answering any more questions."

His whole tone and bearing during this speech indicated that he had been coached by another as to what he should say.

"Very well," returned the detective, rising. "There is no doubt in my mind that you could give me a good deal more information if you chose, but if you have no more interest in your own affairs than that it will be useless to urge you further. I shall learn all the facts, however, have no apprehension on that score. I only hope for your sake that the discovery will not make a bad showing for yourself. Good-day."

And the young man started for the door.

"Stay!" cried the little old man. "I hope you are not going away with the notion that I personally have had anything to do with this crime?"

"Of your own volition, I do not believe you have," returned Bob, pausing with his hand on the door-knob. "But I am not so sure that you have not been influenced by this 'evil genius' you spoke of."

"My God! do you think that?" cried the other, turning very pale. "You are mistaken, sir! I—I—"

"Nevertheless, I shall learn the facts," interrupted the detective, "be assured of that. I never start in for a thing without succeeding. Good-day."

With that the detective left the house, while the little old man stood watching him with an expression of mingled wonder and consternation.

Bob walked on without looking behind him till he reached the gate, which was something like a hundred yards from the house, and from which the house was nearly obscured by the tangled shrubbery. Here he paused instinctively and glanced back toward the house.

Somehow he felt that the little old man would follow him with a view to reviving the conversation and further protesting his innocence, and the detective was rather in hopes that he would, as that would have given him an opportunity of asking a few more important questions!

But in this he was disappointed. When he looked back there was no one in sight, and after gazing for some moments, hoping that the old man might appear, he was about to turn away from the gate, when his attention was attracted by a movement among the tangled shrubbery at one side of and some distance from the path.

He paused and looked again, but at first could see nothing.

But presently he became conscious of a human head moving among the shrubbery.

Concealing himself behind the hedge at the side of the gate, Bob watched.

He had not done so long before the head, the owner of which was slowly advancing toward the gate, became distinctly visible.

It was that of the little old woman.

Her eyes were wild with excitement, and she glared about her as if in momentary expectation of seeing some one upon whom she desired to vent her wrath.

Bob watched her curiously and wondered what she was up to.

Meanwhile she drew nearer and nearer to the gate.

Finally when very near the gate she emerged from the shrubbery into the path, and, after glancing cautiously about as if to make sure that she was not watched, she stole

up to the gate and peeped through the bars. Bob drew himself closer into the hedge to prevent her from seeing him, and watched her movements.

She stood there for a long time looking up and down the road as if expecting some one, and Bob began to wonder at last whether she was not watching for him, and was on the point of emerging from his place of concealment for the purpose of ascertaining what she wanted, when he was deterred by the sound of footsteps behind him, and turning his eyes in the direction, was surprised to see Headly and another man coming along the road.

They were not more than a dozen paces from him, but as they were gazing toward the gate, did not appear to notice him.

About the same time the little old woman espied them and, darting along the inside of the hedge, approached to within ten feet of where the detective was concealed.

Here she stopped at a point where the hedge grew so thin that she could easily look through, and putting her face to an opening called out in a soft voice to the two young men.

They stopped and turned toward the hedge, and in doing so came so close to the detective that he could have put out his hand and touched them.

Bob drew himself as far into the hedge as possible to avoid possible detection.

The old woman chuckled with evident satisfaction as the men drew near and, pushing her hand through the hedge to them, said

"Howdy?"

This was uttered in a subdued, confidential tone, as if the woman were afraid of being overheard.

One of the men grasped her hand and responded:

"How are you, Aunt Barbara? How are you feeling to day?"

"Pretty well, Nate," mumbled the old woman. "How d'ye do yourself?"

"First class," returned the young man.

And then a similar ceremony was repeated by the other young man, after which Headly asked:

"What's the news, auntie? Heard anything?"

"Yes, a good deal," she answered, in an apprehensive tone.

"What, for goodness' sake?" demanded the young man, also apprehensively.

"There has been a detective here this morning. He had a long talk with Ezekiel, and, of course, he had to tell the detective a good deal more than he ought to."

"Whew!" exclaimed the other. "This is interesting to us, Mark. What did he tell him?" asked Headly, turning to the woman again.

"Oh, a lot of stuff about suspecting you, although he did not believe you would do anything of your own free will, and went on harping on his old hobby about the evil genius, as usual."

"This is interesting," repeated the young man. "Has old Stryker been here?"

"No, and from what the detective says, I shouldn't wonder if he has been arrested."

"No he hasn't. They got Farrand and four of the fellows he had with him, but Stryker was not of the party. By the way, what sort of a looking man was this detective?"

"A very young man, not more than eighteen, I should think. I don't see what they expect of such a young fellow."

"I'll bet it's the same one I know," interjected Headly. "If it is, you needn't worry about his youth. He is one of the keenest men, young or old, they have on the force. By the way, I was to call on him at six o'clock this morning, but failed to keep my engagement. I wonder what he will think?"

"What were you to call upon him for?" asked the woman, in great surprise.

"Oh, I had an object in view," laughed the other.

"Well, after what the old man has told him, you'd better keep away."

"Oh, I don't know about that," chuckled Headly. "I wouldn't mind calling upon him and having a chat with him, even now. I think I could set him right with regard to some things."

"Perhaps," sighed the old woman, "but as I say, you had better be careful."

"Oh, I'll take care of myself, auntie. Is the old man within yet?"

"Yes."

"Is he going out soon?"

"I expect him to go any minute."

"Very well. We'll await that interesting event, Mark, before venturing in."

CHAPTER X.

OLD STRYKER.

As the young man uttered the last remark he turned away as if about to take his departure, when the old woman asked:

"When will you be back?"

"Oh, some time this afternoon," replied Headly.

"Where are you going now?"

"I want to go down and see old Stryker."

"What do you want to see him for?"

"I have some matters to settle with him," returned the young man, laughing.

"Very well. You'll be sure to come back this afternoon?" asked the old woman.

"Oh, certainly."

"Get here, if possible, before he comes back."

"Sure."

And tossing a kiss to his aunt, Headly walked away, and his companion followed his example.

During all this time the young man addressed as Mark had not once opened his mouth, except to greet his aunt on first arriving.

Bob was in a quandary now.

He was anxious to follow the young men, but as the old woman still stood at the hedge, eagerly watching the retreating figures, he could not move from his place of concealment without being observed by her, and that would spoil everything, as she would doubtless give the alarm.

However, after allowing the men to get beyond reach of her voice, the detective stepped quickly out of the hedge, and before she was aware of his presence, started at a brisk gait in pursuit.

He had had plenty of opportunity of arresting them while they stood at the hedge, but, although he was satisfied from the conversation he had overheard that they were implicated in the crime, he had also learned enough to convince him that they were not the only ones, and he was anxious to unravel the mystery still further before resorting to this measure.

He plodded on after the young men at a rapid walk, never taking the trouble to look back, for the purpose of ascertaining what the old woman was doing.

He kept them in sight until they turned a corner, and this gave him an opportunity of diminishing the distance between them by increasing his speed, which he accordingly did.

Indeed, when he reached the corner, he found that his run had brought him so close upon their heels that it would be necessary to halt long enough for them to regain a little distance upon him, lest they should see and recognize him.

And, as the spot was a lonely one, with no one in sight, the young detective took advantage of the occasion to adjust a false mustache and goatee to his face, so that the fugitives would not recognize him.

Having completed this task to his satisfaction, and seeing that the fugitives, although walking at a moderate pace, had gained con-

siderable distance on him, the detective proceeded on his way.

Headly and his companion walked as far as the nearest railway station, and when Bob saw that they intended taking a down-town train, increased his pace, in order that he might catch the same train.

When he reached the platform the men were already there, and as there was a little time to spare before the train would arrive, they were walking up and down the platform engaged in confidential conversation.

Bob did not dare venture close enough to them to overhear what they were saying, for fear they might recognize him, so he contented himself with pretending to read the advertisements that lined the wall and keep a side-glance watch of his men.

At length the train arrived and the two men took seats in one of the cars, and Bob was fortunate enough to get a seat directly behind them.

The men continued to converse earnestly and in subdued voices, so much so that the detective could barely catch a word here and there, and not enough to comprehend the drift of their subject. Frequent references were made to "the old man," and it was evident that there was a thoroughly organized conspiracy against him, but the whole ride was made without his discovering any more than he already knew.

Connecting with the Elevated the men alighted at the City Hall station and walked down Adams street to Tillary, and here they turned east and walked to the head of a dirty, forbidding-looking alley half-way between Jay and Bridge streets, and turned into it.

This alley is the only outlet to a tangled labyrinth of wretched, filthy lanes, flanked by tumble-down rookeries, and the locality is known as Stryker's Court.

The rookeries are inhabited by the lowest and most vicious element, mostly negroes, in Brooklyn.

As Bob followed the two men he saw them enter one of the most dilapidated of the shanties, without the formality of knocking at the door.

He stepped to the front door and listened, but not being able to hear anything, he walked to the side of the house where there was a single window which was closed by a broken shutter. There was only a narrow passage between the shanty on this side and the one next to it and as a consequence it was rather dark in there.

By moving the slats of the shutter a little, Bob found that he could look inside. He could also hear anything that might be said by the inmates.

A man of probably sixty, with a most vicious face, sat near a table in the act of emptying a large glass of beer which he had poured from a pitcher which sat on the table, while the two young men were standing near.

"Wul, whut is it?" growled the old fellow, after emptying his glass and smacking his lips.

"We have some work for you to do, Stryker," said Headly, "and we are going to pay well for it."

"That's whut ye've got to do, if I do anything fer ye," muttered the other. "I'm 'bout tired workin' fer nothin'."

"You can't say that we ever had you to work for nothing," pleaded Headly.

"Nex' thing to it," growled Stryker.

"When was that, Stryker?"

"W'y, that Greenpoint job."

"I'm sure you were well paid for that."

"Well paid?"

"Yes."

"W'y, don't ye know that I had to give up nearly every cent I got out of it to keep out of the Pen?"

"Oh, well, we'll pay you well this time, and take care of you if you get into trouble."

"That's sumpin' like," mumbled old Stryker, with a smile of satisfaction, pour-

ing out another glass of beer. "W'at's the job?"

During all this time the visitors had remained standing, but at this point Headly pulled a broken chair up close to the old man and sat down.

The other young man also seated himself, and then ensued a confidential conversation, the nature of which Bob could not make out, although he listened most attentively.

At length Headly arose and said:

"That's agreed, then, is it?"

"Yes," replied old Stryker, "that's all right."

"And you'll make no failure of it, as the others did?"

"Did ye ever know old Stryker to fail?" grumbled the old chap.

"No, I never did, that is true; but, you will have more to contend with this time, and a tougher job than you ever had before."

"Never mind, old Stryker'll be ekel to it."

"Oh, I'm satisfied of that. I wouldn't have come to see you if I hadn't thought so."

"Will you be there?"

"No, we will have to keep away, as there is a good deal of suspicion resting against us already, eh, Mark?"

"Yes," replied the young man addressed; "altogether too much."

"Very well," interjected old Stryker. "I kin manage it alone, I reckon."

The young men then took their leave, and Bob followed them as before.

He did not take the precaution to keep them in sight this time, however, as he already knew where they were going, and arrived at Flatbush at the same time they did.

They went directly to the house, and the detective followed at a respectful distance, and as soon as he saw them enter the front door he slipped through the gate, dodged into the thick foliage, and thus crept along in the direction of the house.

When he reached it he passed around to the rear.

The door of the old-fashioned kitchen stood partially open, and the detective put his head inside to ascertain whether there was anybody in that part of the house or not, and finding that there was not, stepped in, and proceeded noiselessly toward the sitting-room, where he had no doubt he would find the conspirators.

But, he found no one there.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

Not finding the three people—Headly, his friend Mark and the little old woman—in the sitting room, he paused and listened, thinking they might be in some other room on that floor.

But he soon became convinced that either they were not or were talking in voices too subdued to be heard beyond the walls.

So he softly ascended the stairs to the floor above, which he was fortunate enough to reach without encountering any one.

Then he again paused and listened. The sound of voices came to him from somewhere and, guided by the sound, the detective began to look about, and was not long in locating the speakers. They were in a rear room and Bob put his ear to the door, but was unable to hear anything distinctly.

He made out, however, that the speakers were the three persons he was looking for.

He moved along the hall a little way and came to another door.

Guessing that it opened into another room, he tried the knob, and was gratified to find the door unlocked, so he opened it and went in.

It was a small bedroom and, while there was no door communicating with the next apartment, there was a miniature window or ventilator about six feet from the floor, covered with a paper screen.

Placing a chair up to the wall, he mounted it.

This brought him up to a point where he could put his ear to the opening, but he was still unable to hear distinctly, so he resolved upon a bold stroke.

He would cut the paper away.

He realized that he was running a great risk of being discovered in the action, but it was his only alternative and he determined to do it.

Taking out his knife, the detective thrust the blade as noiselessly as possible through the paper.

He then stopped to listen whether the action had attracted the attention of the conspirators, and as they had not ceased talking, concluded it had not, so he drew the knife gently along one side of the paper, cutting it completely away on that side.

Again he listened, and still the conversation was unchecked, so he boldly cut away one end of the screen.

Finding that he was still undiscovered, he drew the blade along the upper side, and the paper curled down, leaving the aperture open.

Now placing his ear to the opening, he could hear everything that was said in the next room.

The first sentence that fell upon his ear filled the young detective with astonishment.

"How came you to go to this detective and divulge the plot?" the little old woman was asking.

"A matter of conscience," replied Headly, lightly.

"What do you mean?"

"My conscience told me at the last moment that it would not be right, and I determined to stop it."

"That will do to tell to somebody that doesn't know you, Nathan Headly," snapped the old woman, "but you needn't tell it to me, for I know better. I know there was some other reason."

"What other reason could I have, auntie?" queried the young man, in an injured tone.

"Your own safety. You were afraid that investigation would implicate yourself, and you were too much of a coward to take chances."

"Well, there is a good deal of truth in that, too, auntie," laughed the young man. "It is not a pleasant thing to know that your neck is in danger."

"Nothing risked, nothing gained," muttered the old woman crustily. "You were in no more danger than the rest of us."

"There is very little satisfaction in that knowledge. Hanging is none the sweeter for knowing that several other people are to hang with you."

"But how can you expect to get your money as long as you shirk like that?"

"Oh, I sha'n't always shirk. There will be no failure this time. Old Stryker was never known to fail."

"It is strange you did not think of him at first."

"There is nothing strange about it. I thought the other man would do as well, and I knew he would be less expensive. Old Stryker has a way of wanting the whole hog himself."

"How do you know that the other man would not have done it as well?"

"I suspected him from what he said."

"What did he say?"

"He complained of being compelled to do the job, and talked as though he would rather not do it, so I concluded that he was the very man to weaken and peach in a pinch."

The other young man, who up to this time had taken no part in the conversation, laughed a low, sarcastic laugh.

"That's funny," he said. "When you found you could not trust him why did you not stop him then and there—tel' him he needn't go on with the job? It seems to me

that that would have been just as easy as going to a detective and giving the whole thing away."

Bob caught a glimpse of Headly's face at this moment, and he could see that the other's remarks had startled him.

He was flushed and agitated, and seemed at a loss for an answer for some time, but he soon rallied, smiled indulgently, and replied:

"It looks all very easy, Mark—in theory, but it was not so easy in practice. In the first place, it did not occur to me until after I had had the talk with him and left him. Then I got to thinking the matter over and the whole weight of his words came to me. But it was too late then. He had already gone to Brooklyn, and I knew that if I went over there I would lay myself liable to be arrested with the rest, if the police should get onto the plot, so I thought the easiest way out of it was to go to this detective and let him into the secret, and if the plot should fall through and our scheme should be discovered, the detective would exonerate me."

"Ah, very plausible, and very considerate on your part," sneered Mark. "At least for yourself. It made little difference to you what became of the rest of us, however."

Headly laughed lightly.

"Of course not," he observed. "In an affair of this kind every one must look out for himself. That is the way I look at it."

"And very naturally, too. It is entirely consistent with your selfishness."

This only caused the other to laugh again, and his indifference appeared to nettle Mark immeasurably.

"Look here, Nathan Headly!" he snarled, "I want you to understand that this is a matter of life and death with all of us. You may treat the subject lightly, but I tell you it is extremely serious. And another thing I want you to remember is, that if you betray us this time and any harm comes of it, you shall pay the penalty!"

The young man indulged in another laugh.

"Indeed?" he muttered. "What, may I ask, would be the consequences?"

"I cannot say," replied the other savagely. "But I will say this much, that I shall not hold myself responsible for my actions!"

"Indeed?" sneered Headly again, following his words with a low, sardonic chuckle.

"It might be as well to complete your arrangements in time."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," retorted Headly, jumping to his feet, and assuming a defensive attitude for the first time, "that it will be too late after Jack Catch gets you in his coils! So, whatever you contemplate in the way of vengeance had better be carried out before that interesting period."

The other was stricken dumb for an instant by this declaration, but he finally recovered enough to say, somewhat half-heartedly:

"I suppose you entertain no apprehension regarding yourself?"

"You are mistaken," rejoined Headly in a calmer voice. "I realize that if this thing falls through I stand the same chance of arrest and prosecution as the rest of you."

"Not if you betray us to the authorities," sneered Mark.

"There is no danger of that," growled Headly, sullenly.

"I am not so sure of that. You have just confessed to having done so before, admitting that one of your reasons was that you would be exonerated in case of exposure. How are we to know that you will not repeat your treachery?"

"I object to your alluding to my action by that term!" cried the other vehemently, glaring at Mark.

"Tell me a better or more appropriate term then?" sneered Mark, with a chuckle.

"I am not here to furnish synonyms for

you, sir, but if you repeat that epithet, curse you! I'll—"

Mark sprung to his feet.

"Do you think that I am afraid to tell you what you are, Nathan Headly?" he almost screamed. "Do you think that I am afraid to call you by your right name? I tell you you are a coward and a traitor. You—"

But he got no further, for the other had clutched him by the throat with one hand while with the other he raised a gleaming knife above him!

CHAPTER XII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

BOB's first impulse was to try to fly to the rescue of the imperiled man, but, upon second thought, he decided to do nothing of the kind.

It was no affair of his, and, indeed, was a case of "diamond cut diamond."

Besides, after what he had just heard, his sympathies were rather with Headly.

He believed the young man intended to betray the conspirators, and, although he had no love for traitors as a rule, this was a case in which he believed the traitor should be commended.

The detective, therefore, looked quietly on, eagerly awaiting the outcome of the fray.

He was emboldened, however, to tear away the paper from the window and place himself in such a position that he had a perfect view of the interior of the room.

All this had passed in a few seconds.

The instant Headly grasped Mark by the throat the latter began to struggle manfully to break his assailant's hold, which prevented the other from striking the fatal blow.

Still he held the knife high over his head, eagerly watching his opportunity, and the deadly glare in his eyes showed that he had no intention of neglecting the opportunity when it presented itself.

Meanwhile, the little old woman was dancing about the room in an ecstasy of excitement and terror.

At length Headly saw his opportunity, as he thought, and made a vicious slash with his knife, which would have buried itself in the other's shoulder had he not dodged. As it was, the blade just missed its mark, but came close enough to slit the young man's coat to the waist.

A fearful struggle ensued.

Neither man spoke, but there was a fiendish glare in the eyes of each which Bob knew meant nothing short of murder.

The detective took in the situation at a glance.

He knew that it could be but a short time before one or the other would gain the upper hand and the other would die.

Bob did not hesitate long.

By a terrific blow with his fist he sent the man with the knife sprawling and unconscious into the middle of the floor and secured the knife.

As soon as he was released Headly jumped to his feet and the two men came face to face once more.

Headly stared at the detective with a dazed expression for a few seconds, and seemed unable to recall where he had seen that face.

Bob stared him straight in the eye, and finally asked:

"Don't you remember me, Mr. Headly?"

The detective had removed his false beard.

"Yes," replied the other at length, feebly. "You are the detective, aren't you?"

"I thought you ought not to have forgotten me after the interview we had."

"Yes, I remember you now, but what—what—are you doing here?" faltered Headly.

"Well, just at present I am here to save your life; but a moment ago I might have done as much for the other man."

As he spoke the detective glanced in the

direction of the man he had knocked down, and saw that he had recovered consciousness and had risen to a sitting posture, and was staring about in a dazed sort of way.

"Come, my friend," said Bob. "Get up. I want you to take a walk with me."

At the same time the detective drew a revolver and leveled it at the fellow.

Mark stared stupidly up at him, but did not open his lips to speak.

"Get up, I say!" repeated Bob, sharply. "I have business with you, and I want no delay about it either."

The fellow slowly got upon his feet, but the blow he had received had made him dizzy, and he reeled and caught hold of a chair to prevent himself from falling.

"Allow me," said Bob, approaching him with a pair of handcuffs. "Hold out your hands until I put on these ornaments."

The fellow hesitated, but when the detective repeated the command, finally put out his hands.

Bob was about to snap the irons on him, when some one touched him on the shoulder, and he looked around.

To his surprise and consternation, he found the shining barrel of a revolver within an inch of his face!

The weapon was in the hands of Headly.

For an instant he was unnerved and flustered.

There was a sardonic smile on the man's face as Bob looked at him, and he even gave vent to the low chuckle the detective had heard while the other was talking to his cousin.

"It pains me to do it," smiled Headly, with mock suavity, "but I must ask you to drop that revolver and throw up your hands! As I say, it pains me to have to do it, especially after your having saved my life; but I don't see how I am to avoid it. Throw up your hands, I say, or I shall let her go!"

Bob thought rapidly.

Meanwhile he studied the other's face.

There was an expression of cool determination that showed the man to be capable of doing anything.

But the detective could not understand what it all meant.

Here the two men had attempted to kill each other, and there was no doubt that the man who now pointed a revolver at his face would have been a dead man ere this only for his timely interference, and now that same man seemed determined to repay his kindness by killing him. In his dismay Bob turned to the other man.

To his horror he too had a pistol leveled at him!

CHAPTER XIII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

Bob was nonplussed for a moment.

He saw not only that the men had the drop on him, but that they were in terrible earnest.

But he did not lose his presence of mind. He realized that everything depended upon his coolness.

Instead of obeying the order to throw up his hands, therefore, he turned coolly upon Headly, smiled affably, and said:

"I suppose you think you've got the drop on me, don't you, Mr. Headly?"

"Throw up your hands!" commanded that gentleman, impatiently.

"Why, certainly," smiled Bob. "Anything to accommodate you. But don't you think it a little unkind to ask me to do such a thing, after saving your life?"

"Nobody asked you to interfere in my affairs," growled the other. "Throw up your hands!"

"Certainly. But, I say, don't you know that you would have been a beautiful corpse by this time only for my interference?"

"Possibly I would, but that is my business. Throw up your hands, I tell you!"

"With great pleasure. However, if I should conclude not to throw up my hands, then what?"

"I'll shoot you!" roared the other, savagely.

"No, really?"

"Yes I will, and I sha'n't delay much about it if you don't obey my order."

"Oh, well, if you put it in that way, of course, I have no more to say," said the detective, still politely.

Thus he kept on dallying until the fellow's hand in which he held the revolver began to shake from being suspended in that attitude so long.

Rob had gradually edged back so that he had the two men pretty well in front of him, and he kept them well under his vision.

At length Mark lost patience and growled:

"Let him have it, Nate! What is the use of monkeying so long? Don't you see he is watching for an opportunity to get the drop on you?"

This speech was the most unfortunate thing that could have happened to the two men.

It detracted the attention of both from the main object for an instant, and during that brief space of time Bob gained the advantage he had been waiting for.

With the quickness of a flash of lightning, first his right and then his left fist shot out like catapults, and the two men dropped to the floor as though they had been shot.

And then without the least hesitation the detective dropped upon Mark and in a twinkling had the handcuffs on him.

He then sprung to his feet and turned his attention to the other man, but, brief as the time had been, he had regained his feet with the assistance of the little old woman, and was on the point of slipping out of the room when the detective looked at him.

"Stop!" yelled Bob. "Take another step in that direction and you are a dead man!"

At the same time covering the fellow with his revolver and advancing upon him.

But Headly was too anxious to escape to think of fear at that moment.

Besides, during the brief interval which it required Bob to deliver the above utterance the little woman had thrown the door open, and the fellow had only to glide through, which he lost no time in doing.

Bob was after him in an instant.

The little old woman saw his intention and slammed the door before he had time to reach it, but before she could lock it, as she attempted to do, he hurled her to one side, opened the door and dashed out.

But the delay she had caused him was sufficient.

When the detective reached the hall the fugitive was not in sight.

And then he lost a good deal of precious time in searching several rooms in the vain hope of finding his man, only to be compelled to give it up in despair at last.

It then occurred to him to do what he should have done in the first instance, to go to the little woman and compel her to disclose the hiding-place of the fugitive.

With that end in view, he returned to the room where he had left her and the prisoner.

It was then he realized the mistake he had made in running after Headly, for not only was the little woman gone, but the prisoner also.

Bob was satisfied that they could not have left the house, or that they had even gone down-stairs, and he determined to find them at all hazards.

His first thought was that they had gone into the room from which he witnessed the first part of the fight between the two cousins.

But when he revisited the room he found it empty.

He then proceeded to the next room, and found the door locked.

This satisfied him that they were in there, so he knocked violently at the door and demanded admission, but there was no response.

He repeated the summons several times, each time with renewed vigor, but all to no purpose.

There was no response from within, and he at last determined to force an entrance.

The door was old and frail as chamber doors of these old fashioned houses are apt to be, and he knew that it would not be difficult to break it open.

And so it proved, for when he threw his weight against it, the door yielded.

But, to his disappointment and chagrin, when he had gained an entrance he found himself no better off than before, for the room was empty.

The detective was puzzled, but not dismayed, for he still believed the people must be on that floor somewhere.

This was the last room on that side of the hall, but there were three on the opposite side, and he lost no time in visiting them.

Two of these were unlocked and his entrance was an easy matter, but he was not fortunate enough to find the fugitive in either, and he tried the third.

The door of this was locked, but he soon burst it in as he had done the other one, but with the same result.

No one was to be found.

He now began to think there was some secret outlet to the rooms, and he made a search of the six rooms in detail for the purpose of discovering such a thing. But when he had spent an hour in this work, he became satisfied that there was no such thing.

Later, however, he discovered what he concluded to be the secret of their disappearance—a back stairway.

This he had somehow overlooked in his excitement, but he now recognized that the two people could easily have left the room during his absence in search of Headly and slipped down this back stairway; so he hurried down stairs.

When he reached the lower hall he encountered the little old man, who had just come in.

The latter was surprised to see the detective there and could not speak for some seconds.

Meanwhile the detective addressed him.

"Where are all the folks?" he asked, as coolly as if nothing unusual had happened.

"I dunno," returned the old man, more astonished than ever. "I've just come in. You ought to know."

"I wish I did," rejoined Bob. "If I did, I would not ask you."

"But—but—" faltered the old man, "you just came down-stairs."

"That is true enough," smiled Bob.

"Well, how did you get up there without seeing any one? How did you get into the house?"

"I have seen them—in fact had a pretty lively time with them since I came in, but they disappeared awhile ago, and now I want to know what has become of them."

The old man was puzzled at this, for knowing nothing of what had passed, it was all an enigma to him.

Without taking the trouble to explain matters, however, the detective went on:

"Now, old gentleman, I want you to help me hunt those people. If we find them, all well and good. I shall not molest you. But if we fail, and I think it is through any fault of yours, I shall have to arrest and take you to the police station."

"But how am I to know where they are, when I have just come in?" pleaded the other.

"You can at least hunt. You know where all the hiding-places are about the place."

Frightened nearly out of his wits, the old man began to search, but all to no purpose.

It soon became apparent to Bob that the old fellow was as helpless in the matter as he himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

DRY PUMPING.

"WELL," murmured the old man, at last, "I suppose you'll have to arrest me, for I cannot find those people. Are you sure they were here?"

"Sure?" echoed Bob. "Why, didn't I have the irons on Mark?"

"Mark Oakman?"

"I suppose that is his name," returned the detective, "although I never heard any other name than Mark."

"And you say you had the handcuffs on him?"

"Yes."

"What did you want to arrest him for?"

"Why, my dear man, do you not know that he is the ringleader in this plot to blow up your mill?"

"No, I didn't know it," replied the old man, with a look of consternation. "I suspected he and Nate were both into it, but I wasn't sure."

"Well, sir, you were right in suspecting both of them, although Headly, who appears to be the leader, is in reality being led by the other and—"

"Who?"

"Can't you guess?"

"You don't mean the evil genius?"

"Exactly."

"You have discovered who that is, then?"

"Oh, it is no recent discovery. I knew as soon as I saw her put her head in at the door this morning and call you out that she was the person you meant."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes. And now I want you to tell me (for I know you can if you have a mind to) something about this conspiracy. So far as I can see, these three people are trying to ruin you. The little old woman appears to be the leader, or instigator, and Oakman to be her first lieutenant, and, while Headly is in it also, I am convinced that he would not be were he not coerced by the other two. They are aware of the fact, too, and are extremely suspicious of him."

"Suspicious of him?" interposed the old man.

"Yes."

"How is that?"

"Why, you see, he betrayed them the last time, and they fear that he will do it again. They had a fight a little while ago, and if it had not been for me, there would have been murder."

"I'm afraid they fooled you," said the old man, smiling.

"What do you mean?"

"Those boys would not fight."

"But I saw them with my own eyes. Each tried his utmost to down the other."

"How did you manage to see all this?"

Bob explained how he had climbed up to the little window, cut away the paper, and saw and heard all that went on.

At the conclusion, the old man smiled and said:

"Are you sure they did not see you?"

"Quite sure."

"Because," pursued the other, reflectively, "it seems incredible that they should not have seen you, and, if they did, this fight may have been a ruse to throw you off the track?"

"It isn't possible," returned Bob, testily.

"Maybe not, but it would be just like them."

Bob was silent for some moments, and then continued:

"Well, tell me what you know about this conspiracy. I haven't much time, as it is growing late. They are going to make another attempt on the mill to-night, and I must be on hand."

"Going to make another attempt to—

night?" gasped the old man. "Are you sure?"

"I heard them laying their plans."

"Are you sure it was that they were planning?"

"I judged it was from what they said."

"This is terrible, if true, but I cannot believe it," moaned the old man. "It must have been something else."

"What else could it have been?"

The old man started as if the detective had touched him on a tender spot.

He was visibly confused for some moments, but managed to falter at last:

"Really, sir, I—I—don't know, but—"

"Well, never mind," interrupted Bob, impatiently. "But, tell me what you know about the conspiracy to blow up the mill. This woman appears to have a great desire that it should be done—so much so that I heard her tell Headly that unless the job was done he would receive no money. From this I inferred that she was to bribe the young men to do the job. Now, what has she to gain by the crime?"

"Oh, sir, don't ask me," moaned the old man piteously. "I cannot tell you."

"You can if you will."

"No, no, no, I cannot."

"Why not?"

"They would kill me—no, I mean I don't know."

"Very well, I shall have to arrest you," interjected the detective, impatiently. "guess you will conclude to tell when you are put on the witness stand."

"Not if I were to be hanged, drawn and quartered, I would not."

Bob was perplexed.

He did not want to arrest the old man, for the reason that he did not believe him guilty of any crime himself. But how was he to worm this secret from him otherwise?

"You would rather be arrested than tell, then?"

"Yes, not only arrested, but hanged."

Bob reflected a moment, and then asked:

"Do you know a man by the name of Stryker?"

Again the old fellow started as if he had been pricked with a pin.

"Yes—that is, I have heard of him," he stammered. "He is said to be a very bad man."

"But you don't know him personally?"

"No, sir."

"You are quite sure of this?"

"Oh, I have seen him," the other admitted still greatly confused.

"Did you ever hire him to do anything for you?"

"Hire him?" and the old man turned pale and stared at the detective with a scared expression.

"Yes, to do any work for you," persisted Bob.

"Oh, no, he never did anything for me," answered the old man with a great effort, and his action, as well as the tone in which the denial was uttered, led the detective to believe that the old man was not telling the truth.

However, he passed it over, and continued:

"What have you ever heard about this man?"

"Oh, I have heard that he was a thief, and nearly everything else but a good man."

"Did you know that your two nephews were sometimes in the habit of hiring him to do their dirty work?"

"Dirty work?" queried the other, with a puzzled countenance.

"Yes, just such things as this blowing up of the mill."

"I never did," answered he promptly.

"What were they mixed up in up at Greenpoint some time ago?"

"Nothing, so far as I know."

"You are sure that you never heard of

them hiring this Stryker to do something crooked, and that Stryker was arrested for the crime, and it cost him about all he got for the job to get out of it? Did you never hear of anything of this kind?"

"I never did," replied the other firmly. "I have heard that he had been arrested several times for his crimes, and that he had spent several terms on the island."

"Well, sir," said Bob at last, "either you are telling me a lot of untruths, or these folks of yours are succeeding in keeping you in the dark pretty well."

"They may be keeping me in the dark—in fact, I know that there is a good deal going on among them that I know nothing about—but to the best of my knowledge and belief, I am telling you nothing but the truth."

"I hope so," mused Bob. "By the way, what relation is this little old woman to you? I hear your nephews call her auntie."

"She is my sister," answered the old man quickly.

"Has she ever been mixed up with any crimes so far as you know?"

The old man hesitated.

"N—no," he finally faltered, "not so far as I know."

"I am afraid you did not tell me the truth that time," smiled the detective.

The other grew very red, but made no reply.

"Well, I guess I won't arrest you this evening," pursued Bob, after a pause. "But you had better make up your mind to tell the truth concerning the matter by the time I come again."

Bob then left the house, and made his way once more toward the mill, stopping long enough on the way to get a bite to eat.

CHAPTER XV.

HEADED OFF.

It was some time after nightfall when Bob arrived at the mill, and nothing but darkness and quiet prevailed.

He was surprised to find the same watchman on duty, after telling Masterson the connection the fellow had with the attempted explosion of the night before.

The detective refrained from speaking to the watchman, for fear the latter might recognize him and betray him to the conspirators when they arrived, but sauntered on past him with an indifferent air, as though he did not see him.

When he got to the opposite side of the building he cast his eyes about over the establishment to ascertain whether there was any sign of movement or not, but there was neither sight nor sound of a living creature about the place.

He therefore passed on to the little hut where the electric battery had been.

All was darkness within, but, not satisfied with that, the detective put his ear to the key-hole and listened.

There was no sound, and he decided that the conspirators had not yet arrived.

They were not likely to commence operations until some time after midnight, he was aware, but there was nothing like being on time to catch the progress of affairs.

He would have a long and tedious wait, but that was his only alternative, so he crossed over to the opposite side of the street and proceeded to kill time by pacing up and down, meanwhile watching every movement in the vicinity of the mill.

As he walked to and fro and the weary hours dragged on, the detective's mind was busy.

He went over in detail the strange case so far as he had traced it, and soon arrived at the decision that it was the most mysterious of any case he had ever been engaged upon.

One thing in particular impressed itself upon him, and that was with regard to the two men whom he had locked in the mill.

In view of what he had since learned, he could not believe they were Oakman and Headley, otherwise they would have made some allusion to the circumstance during the conversation which he had overheard between them.

Assuming this to be true, then, there must be still others mixed up in the affair.

Another thing that recurred to him now was the old man's refusal to divulge any of the secrets of the conspirators, and again to his hint that there was some other plot under consideration.

What could it be?

Possibly, after all, there was some other plot and it was that, instead of the blowing up of the mill, for which they had engaged old Stryker.

If this was the case his vigilance would all be for nothing.

Again, the detective could not help asking himself why was the little old woman so anxious to blow up the mill? What was she to gain? And this brought him to think of what the old man had said about the mill being insured for more than it was worth.

Possibly the old woman was to be the beneficiary of the insurance and for that reason was anxious to have the mill destroyed so that she could get the money.

These and many more similar thoughts filled his head as he paced back and forth hour after hour, and when the hour of midnight came and passed, he began to think more than ever that the old man's theory was correct.

And then when he heard the clocks strike the hour of one, and then two, he was almost convinced that he had put in a tiresome night for nothing.

Still, he could not tear himself away.

There appeared to be a charm that held him to the spot, and he would no more than make up his mind to abandon his vigil than he would be seized with a desire to remain a little longer.

And thus three o'clock came, and there was still no appearance of any one in the vicinity of the mill.

At length he made up his mind that he would not remain a minute longer, and turned upon his heels to go, but as he did so he cast one last look in the direction of the mill, when a sight met his gaze that caused him to pause and change his resolution.

It was four men who had just approached the watchman and were engaged in conversation with him.

Bob moved quickly into a patch of shadow and watched them.

Pretty soon he saw them leave the watchman and start toward the rear of the mill.

Bob wanted no more. He was satisfied what was on the tapis now, and there was no time to be lost.

He hurried along to the other side of the mill from that which the men had gone, and thus passed to the rear.

Moving cautiously along the rear end of the building, he finally arrived at the corner, near which the area door was located where they would be likely to enter.

The men had already passed down the area and into the passage when the detective arrived at the corner.

He crept along to the side of the door and listened.

He could hear the footsteps of the men as they passed along the dark passage, but they had made no light.

Bob continued to listen until he heard them unlocking the iron doors leading into the basement, and as soon as he was satisfied they had passed inside he hurried noiselessly along the passage until he arrived at the door.

The rascals had left the door open, so he slipped through, groped his way to a corner, and crouched down to await developments.

By this time the men had reached the stone pillar in the center of the building and were talking in subdued tones.

At length one of them struck a match and lighted a candle.

This gave Bob an excellent opportunity of watching their movements from his dark corner.

One of the men carried a box similar in appearance to the one he had seen the night before, and after some parley, he stepped up and placed it in the opening in the stone pillar, after which the wire was attached as it had been the previous night.

When this was done there was a long conference between the men, and then they turned to go.

As they did so, and the light from the candle illuminated their faces, Bob tried to discover who they were, but they one and all had their faces smeared with soot, so that he could recognize none of them.

When near the door the man who carried the candle blew it out, and they were about to pass out, when Bob for the first time realized his peril in the event of their locking the door after them.

He also desired to detain the men if possible, although this would be a big undertaking, considering the difference in numbers, but he believed he was equal to the occasion.

Hurrying back to the pillar where the box of dynamite was deposited, he first flashed the light of his lantern on the cavity and then hurriedly drew out the box.

As soon as he had accomplished this he turned

off his light again and hastened back to his corner.

The whole thing had been accomplished so quickly that the men, who had stopped on the threshold, had not recovered from their astonishment when it was all over and the light extinguished.

Then, after a brief silence, there was an excited hum of voices.

It was evident the men were in a quandary what to do, but finally one of them drew a revolver and fired in the direction of the pillar, supposing that Bob would still be there.

Then, waiting for a few minutes and hearing no sound, one of them said:

"I guess you brought him down. Let us go back and fix that box again."

"Better be careful," observed another. "You can't tell. He may not be hurt and is just laying for us."

"Who's afeared?" growled another, whom Bob imagined he recognized as old Stryker. "I kin git away with all yer dude detectives!"

With that he was heard to move in the direction of the pillar.

Bob imagined he heard all of them going and, after waiting long enough for them to reach it, he glided softly toward the door, intending to close it so that they could not get out and then make another capture as he had done the night before.

But when he reached the door he found that he had made a great mistake, for the first he knew he ran into the arms of one of the men, who had remained at the door.

And before he had time to make any move toward retreating or preparing for attack, a powerful pair of hands clutched him by the throat and the owner of the hands called out:

"Dere, Mike, I've got him by the wizzen; pin his flippers from behind."

The command was no more than given when it was obeyed.

A pair of giant hands grasped his arms and drew them back behind him in a painful position, rendering the detective powerless to move.

Meanwhile the two other men who had gone to the pillar had relighted the candle and readjusted the box in its place.

"Now den," said one of the ruffians who held Bob, "trow him."

CHAPTER XVI.

A THRILLING EXPERIENCE.

BOB saw that it was all up with him, and his fate depended upon luck or stratagem.

He knew the ruffians would have no mercy on him, and he was equally aware that he was comparatively helpless in their hands.

So he decided to offer no resistance, and allow matters to shape themselves for the present.

The ruffian who had grasped his arms, assisted by the other, threw the detective upon his face, and then one powerful fellow pinioned him in that position by placing his great, heavy knee in the middle of his back and drawing his hands back and crossing them under his shoulder blades.

"Got a cord 'bout yer, Mike?" growled the ruffian. "I wanter tie de dude's flippers so's we won't hev no more trouble wid 'im."

"Oi t'ink Oi hov wan somepheres," rejoined the other.

"Wal, hand it out, quick," grumbled the first.

Mike fumbled through his pockets and finally handed out a strong cord.

"There yez air," said Mike. "Thot'll howled the divvil till the cows kims home."

"W'ot is it?"

"Sure an' it's a bit av a fish-loine," rejoined Mike, "an's warranted nivver to rip, ravel, wear out nor git durthy."

Meanwhile the other was busy winding the cord about the detective's wrists.

When his hands were thoroughly secured, the ruffian said:

"There, he'll not git his flippers loose very soon, I'll warrant. Now gimme annudder piece o' cord to tie his feet."

"Faix, it's too much yez do be axin' me now, Tommy," returned the Irishman.

"Ain't yer got none?" snarled Tommy.

"Divvil a bit."

"Wal, look about an' find some, an' be in a hurry 'bout it."

"Wurra, an' how d'ye expect a mon to foind anything in the da rk, loike that!"

"Go back there an' borry de can'le. See?"

But Mike was spared the trouble, for a few moments later the men had completed the work.

of rearranging the dynamite charge and came to see what the two ruffians were doing.

"What have we here?" queried one of the men, holding the candle down close to the prospective detective.

"Oh, it's a beak w'ot was pryin' roun'," rejoined the other, "an' me an' Mike jes' t'ought we'd fix 'im up so's he wouldn't pester nobody no more."

"Good for you, Stryker!" ejaculated the man with the candle. "What are you going to do with him?"

This was a surprise for Bob, for he had thought that Stryker had come back with the others.

"W'y, if I kin find annudder piece o' string to tie his laigs, I t'ought we might lug 'im over dere by de pillar an' leave 'im while de blas' goes off. Yer see, it'd be a easy way o' gittin' rid o' a nuisance, an' nobuddy wouldn't know w'ot become on 'im."

"Excellent idea!" exclaimed the other. "Let us see if we cannot find you a piece of rope. Don't you know where there is any rope, Mike?"

"Faix, Oi don't," replied Mike, "but if you'll lend me the loan av yez's candle, Oi'll luck for wan."

He was given the candle and went away.

In the course of ten minutes or so he returned with a piece of strong rope.

"Wull that do, sor?" he asked, banding the rope to the man who had given him the candle. The latter took it and gave it to Stryker.

"How's that, old man?" he asked.

"Dat's de dinctum," growled the ruffian, and at once set to binding Bob's ankles together.

When the job was completed to the satisfaction of old Stryker, the detective was so securely bound that he could scarcely move, and he already felt his limbs growing numb from the retarded circulation caused by the gripping cords.

When the ruffian had finished his work and arose to his feet, he turned the detective over on his back with his foot, and as he did so, the man who had been the principal spokesman all along took the candle and, putting it down to Bob's face, examined it for a few seconds.

"I thought so," he at length mused. "The same chap. I thought I recognized him when he flashed the light back there by the pillar.

"Who is it, Nate?" questioned the man who had accompanied him when he went to rearrange the dynamite charge.

"Why, don't you see? It's the young detective who was out to the house yesterday."

The other bent over and peered into Bob's face curiously and finally said:

"That's true. It's the same chap. Well, I guess he won't put his nose into anybody else's business after to-night."

"I guess not," rejoined Headly (for Bob was satisfied that it was he from the name Nate). "But we are losing time. Stryker, Mike, Pick him up and carry him back to the pillar."

The two giants lifted the detective in their arms as though he had been an infant and carried him back to the pillar.

There was a ledge about two feet wide on all four sides of the pillar formed by the foundation, which was that much wider than the rest of the pillar, and when the men reached the spot with the detective, Headly said:

"Lay him upon the ledge. He will be sure to get the full benefit of the blast there. There might be some chance for him if we left him on the ground."

Accordingly, he was placed upon the ledge.

"That will do," observed the same worthy, approvingly. "Now let us go. The other job must be done before the sun rises, and there is no time to spare."

The four men then withdrew, leaving Bob to his fate.

During all this time not a word had been addressed to him, and he was too busy with his thoughts to feel any inclination to speak to any of his enemies.

A full realization of his situation did not dawn upon him with all its horrible significance until he heard the grating sound caused by the closing and locking of the iron door.

Then it was that he realized his terrible peril and utter helplessness.

There appeared to be no hope for him, for he could move neither hand or foot, and it could but be a few minutes at most before the electric current would be sent in which would set off the dynamite and hurl him into eternity.

As he realized his situation the cold perspiration came out upon his face, and for the first time in his life, Bowery Bob lost hope.

But it was only for an instant.

The succeeding moment a revulsion of feeling came over him.

His despair was replaced by indignation, wrath, fury, and, better than all, determination.

He might die, but he would not die submissively.

He would breathe his last, making a heroic effort for life and liberty.

There would be a satisfaction in that, at least.

He accordingly began to squirm and twist, exerting every nerve of his athletic body against the gripping bonds.

But they did not yield in the least.

Without losing his courage, however, he continued his heroic efforts and worked so vigorously that he soon found the perspiration oozing from every pore.

And then suddenly an unexpected thing happened.

In his squirming he had worked himself so close to the edge of the ledge that he at last lost his balance and rolled off to the concrete floor below.

The fall did him no harm, and he felt that one point was gained at least.

The slight chance of escape by being on the floor instead of on the ledge, which Headly had spoken of, was at last his now.

But he did not cease tugging at the cords that bound his limbs.

And now another thought suggested itself to him.

If he could contrive to roll he might get away from the blast and be in no less danger when it went off, although he knew there was slight hope of escape so long as he was anywhere in the building.

At any rate, there would be a feeling of satisfaction in placing a little distance between himself and the demon of destruction, and so he attempted the difficult feat of rolling over.

Bound as he was, it was a difficult and painful effort, but by exerting his full strength he succeeded in turning over once, and elated with his success, tried it again.

After a little while he found it less difficult, and in the course of a few minutes he had gained considerable distance.

But at length he stopped. He stopped, partly from sheer exhaustion, but mainly from a sudden thought that thrilled through him like an electric current.

Why did not the blast go off?

He twisted his head around in such a way as to look in the direction of the pillar, and there was a blue flame dancing along the wire, but still the blast did not go off! What could it mean?

CHAPTER XVII.

A LUCKY ACCIDENT.

BOWERY BOB lay watching the illuminated wire in wonder and astonishment.

What could be the meaning of the phenomenon?

Was it that the wire had become disconnected in some way?

This must be the cause.

And then, as he watched it, the wire ceased to glow, and he knew the current had been turned off.

This brought another feeling of apprehension.

As soon as the men found that the blast would not go, they would return to ascertain the cause.

Finding the detective where he was, they would, doubtless, not only replace him on the ledge, but arrange it so that he would be compelled to remain there.

The apprehension caused him to renew his exertions to free himself from his bonds, although he entertained little hope of success.

However, in the course of a few minutes, he had the satisfaction of feeling that his efforts had not been in vain, for the bonds had stretched enough to permit him to move his wrists in them with considerable freedom.

This encouraged him to fresh and greater exertion, and, as the cords continued to stretch and his hands and wrists to grow slimy with perspiration, he was finally able to slip one hand out.

The rest of the task was simple. He had no trouble in removing the cord from the remaining hand, after which he lost no time in securing his knife and cutting the ropes off his ankles, and was once more a free man, so far as his bonds were concerned.

But, he could not forget that he was still a prisoner, with the iron door between him and liberty.

He groped his way toward the door as well as he could guess in the dense darkness, but had gone but a short distance in this direction when his foot struck against something on the ground.

Bob stooped and picked the object up, and

was delighted to find that it was his lantern, which had fallen from his hand when the ruffians caught him.

Shooting the slide, he discovered that it was still lit.

His first move after making this discovery was to satisfy his curiosity with regard to the cause of the failure of the dynamite charge to go off.

He was not long in clearing up the mystery.

His own impression in the dust of the floor showed where he had fallen on rolling off the ledge, and he saw that in falling he had encountered the wire, and his weight had jerked it out of the box inside the opening in the pillar.

When the wire fell upon the concrete floor it was what electricians call "grounded," and this explained the phenomenon of the glow when the current was turned on.

The detective was still pondering over the lucky accident which had not only saved his life, but prevented the destruction of the great factory building, when he was startled by the sound of a key turning in the lock of the iron door.

He turned off his light instantly and hastened into the corner where he had previously been concealed.

But on second thought he concluded that it would be better to be closer to the men when they should arrive at the pillar, and hurried back and crouched down behind the pillar itself.

And he was not an instant too soon, for the next moment the door swung open and somebody was heard to enter.

Bob listened, but there was no further sound for a few seconds, indicating that the newcomers had paused, probably also to listen, and then one said:

"I'll swear I saw a light in here. Didn't you think you saw a light, Morris?"

"I'm sure I did," returned the other. "Whoever the party was has put it out."

"Yes, and that places us in a nice position," observed the first, with a quaver in his voice. "For if we attempt to strike a light we place ourselves at his mercy."

"That is true."

"What is to be done?"

"I don't know. There is evidently something wrong with that wire, and we have got to fix it, if we hope to make a success of this business."

"Perhaps we were mistaken about the light," ventured the first speaker. "For how could anybody get in here, with the door locked?"

"It does seem impossible," replied Morris. "Old Stryker is too shrewd to leave anybody in here who would be liable to tamper with the charge or wire."

"Not if he knew it. But the fellow may have been concealed in here."

"Hardly."

"How so?"

"You don't suppose anybody would be foolhardy enough to conceal himself in here, with the prospect of being blown to kingdom-come, do you?"

"No, if he knew there was any such chance. But we do not know but it is some thief who got in here before they arrived, and, seeing what they were doing, took occasion to save himself by disconnecting the wire."

"In that case we are safe enough, for a common thief would not be likely to molest us. At any rate, I propose to go back and ascertain the trouble with the affair."

And then Bob heard approaching footsteps, and he knew from the sound that both men were coming.

No further conversation passed between them till they reached the pillar. Then followed a brief silence, during which the men were doubtless listening.

"Well, here goes," observed one at last. "If we're to be killed, it may as well come first as last. I am going to strike a light."

And suiting the action to the word, he stroked a match on his trowsers and lighted a candle.

As soon as the candle was fairly lighted, he held it above his head and looked about.

Suddenly an idea appeared to strike him, and he started to walk around to the other side of the pillar.

The detective realized that he was in for it and prepared himself to meet the new-comer.

Drawing his revolver, which the other men had fortunately neglected to relieve him of, he awaited the man's approach.

He had not long to wait. A few steps brought the searcher around the angle of the pillar, and he came face to face with Bob, and found the gleaming barrel of a revolver within a few inches of his nose.

"Halt!" thundered the detective. "Throw up your hands!"

The fellow was panic-stricken, so much so that the candle dropped from his nerveless fingers.

This would have militated to the fellow's advantage had it not been for Bob's forethought. But the detective realized that the men would have a chance to escape in the darkness, and he was determined that they should do nothing of the kind.

So the candle had no more than touched the floor when the glare of the detective's lantern flashed into the astonished villain's face.

This had all passed in the fraction of a minute, and the other man had not time to discover what was the matter, when he put his head wonderingly around the corner.

When he saw the revolver leveled at his companion he sprung back, and would have fled, had not Bob thundered another command:

"Halt!" he yelled. "You are both my prisoners, and the first man who tries to escape will receive a bullet through his head!"

These terrible words, coupled with the awful glare of the young detective's eyes, sent a thrill of terror through the two men, and they stood transfixed and helpless, and livid with fear.

"Throw up your hands!" repeated Bob, in thunderous tones.

Both men meekly obeyed, and the detective quietly relieved them of whatever arms were on them, after which he coolly ordered them to put out their hands to receive their handcuffs.

This order was also obeyed in a meek spirit, and when he had snapped the darbies on them, Bob said:

"Now, I believe we are ready to go. March!"

Meek and dispirited, the men marched in front of the cocked revolver to the door, out of it, through the long passage, and thence to the street.

Bob took the precaution to march them around the opposite side of the building from that where the watchman generally stood, and reached the street without the latter observing him.

Here the detective was fortunate enough to meet a policeman with whom he was acquainted, and in a few brief sentences explained the situation to him, after which the policeman went to a patrol box and sent in a call for a wagon.

While they were awaiting the arrival of the wagon Bob related the account of his thrilling experience.

"That was a pretty close call, old fellow," smiled the officer.

"So it was, and one that I don't care about going through again. It was the most thrilling experience I ever went through."

"But you got the game, just the same, eh, Bob?" laughed the other.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

THE first gray streaks of dawn were just breaking in the eastern sky when the patrol wagon dashed up.

The prisoners were hustled in, Bob took his seat alongside of them with the four policemen who had accompanied the wagon, and it drove off to the station.

Here the detective preferred his charge against the men for attempting to blow up the mill, and their names were recorded on the police station "blotter."

Bob was surprised when he heard what the names were.

They were Lester and Morris Masterson, and the men were brothers.

This discovery only added to the mystery, but the detective consoled himself with the thought that it would soon all come out—at least as soon as he had succeeded in capturing the two cousins, which he felt he should soon do.

He was now more satisfied than ever of one fact, and that was that the whole conspiracy was a family affair, and he believed that the little old woman was at the bottom of it.

As soon as the prisoners were safely locked in cells, the young detective engaged a cab and had himself driven with all possible speed to Flatbush.

It was broad daylight when the cab drove up to the corner nearest the house (he did not deem it prudent to drive up in front of the house,) and the detective alighted, told the cabman to wait for him, and proceeded the remainder of the way to the house on foot.

As he approached the dwelling it appeared to be in darkness, but when he passed around to the side, he saw that there was a light in the little room on the second floor in which he had heard the conspiracy.

The next thing was to get into the house.

He passed on round to the rear and tried the kitchen door, but it was fastened.

He might have broken it in, but that would make a noise and he would probably be discovered, so he concluded not to attempt it.

There was a window, closed with a rude wooden shutter at one side of the door, and he tried that.

It was evidently fastened on the inside with a simple hook.

Looking about the yard, he found a thin strip of board, and with this he contrived to unhook the shutter.

The window was closed with a single sash and moved neither up nor down, but with his knife it did not take him long to remove the sash entirely.

He then placed a bench which he found in the yard against the wall and climbed up. Drawing himself up on to the ledge, the detective succeeded in crawling through the window and was soon in the kitchen.

He paused to listen, but there was no sound of any one moving at that early hour, and he moved softly into the hall. The moment he got in here he became sensible of a strong odor of gas, and his suspicions were aroused that there was foul play going on somewhere.

As he moved along the hall in the dim light the detective's keen eyes caught sight of a key sticking in the lock of one of the doors on the opposite side of the hall from the sitting-room, where he had first met the little old man.

He tried the door softly and found it locked.

This aroused his suspicions still more, for why should they lock the door on the outside?

Bob therefore turned the key as noiselessly as possible and opened the door.

The instant he did so he was nearly suffocated by the volume of gas that came rushing out.

Glancing toward a bed which stood in the room, he saw that some one was asleep there, and stepping quickly to the bedside, he recognized the sleeper as the little old man.

It was all clear to him in an instant.

The gas had been turned on to strangle the old man!

This, then, was the other job which was to be perpetrated that night.

Without waiting for further investigation, the young detective snatched the covering off the bed, grasped the unconscious form in his arms and hurried with it from the room.

Carrying it into the sitting-room on the opposite side of the hall, he deposited it on a lounge near a window, and then opened the window.

He next took a small flask of brandy from his pocket and bathed the unconscious man's face with it.

Fortunately the man was not far gone but that he soon recovered consciousness and opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked, in a weak voice.

"You're all right," whispered Bob. "Keep quiet."

"Is that you, Nate?" questioned the old man, trying to make out the detective's face in the dim light.

"Yes," returned Bob, for the sake of pacifying him. "But keep quiet. Don't talk."

"I feel sick," mumbled the old man.

"I don't wonder at it," returned Bob. "Here, take a drink of this brandy and you'll feel better."

He placed the flask to the old man's lips and the latter took a good draught of it.

"Now remain here while I go up-stairs. I'll be back in a few minutes."

"Whew!" cried the old fellow. "The gas is escaping somewhere."

"I know it, uncle," rejoined Bob. "I'm going to see about it."

"Do, Nate," mumbled the other, "and turn it off."

"So I will."

Bob hurried from the room and, entering the bedchamber where he had found the old man, turned off the gas.

He then stole noiselessly up-stairs.

The sound of conversation, mingled with the clinking of glasses, reached his ears as soon as he arrived in the upper hall, and he knew his game were in the identical room where he had seen them before.

Passing on to the door of the next room, and finding it unlocked, he opened it and went in.

From the light shining through he saw that

the little window remained just the same as it had after he cut the screen from it, and placing a chair up to the wall, he stood upon it and looked in.

To his disappointment only three people were in the room, but they were the principals in the conspiracy—the little old woman, Oakman and Headly.

They were sitting near a table upon which were a bottle and three glasses and the conspirators appeared already to have reached a tolerably merry state.

"I wonder if the old man has passed in his chips yet?" said Oakman, with a maudlin chuckle.

"Hardly so soon," rejoined Headly. "Better leave him for a little while longer."

"But we've got to get him away from here before daylight," persisted the other.

"Before daylight (hic)?" hiccuped Headly. "Why, you cursed fool, don't you see it's long after daylight now?"

"So 'tis," mumbled the other in a thick voice. "So 'tis. What we goin' to do?"

"Better leave him right where he is," put in the little old woman, who appeared to be the least affected by the liquor of the three. "After while we'll go down and turn off the gas and open the windows, and when the smell is all out of the house, we will report the case to the police. The coroner will come and decide that the old man died of heart disease, and that will be an end of it."

Bob waited to hear no more.

The heartless manner of these people in speaking of the cold-blooded crime they had just committed, sickened him, and he descended from his perch.

He stole softly down the stairs and out of the building.

A few moments' rapid walk brought him back to where he had left the cab.

"Driver," he said, "do you know where the police-station is out this way?"

"Oi do, sor," replied the cabby.

"Very well. I want you to drive there as fast as you can and notify the sergeant that there has been a murder committed at that house over there," pointing toward the old house he had just left, "and have him send two or three men. I have got the murderers cornered. Be quick, will you?"

"Yis, sor," answered the driver, giving his horse a cut with the whip.

Bob then returned to the house, and, as he had unlocked the front door, he had but to walk in.

Gliding upstairs again, he stole into the little room, mounted the chair and looked through the window to see that his game were still there.

They were, and the two young men were asleep with their heads on the table, while the little old woman was pacing the floor in a nervous state. Bob therefore took his station in the hall to await the arrival of the police.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRANGE CONFESSION.

As soon as the police arrived, Bob gave them a whispered explanation of what had happened. But he had not more than half finished when the little old woman, who had evidently heard the footsteps on the stairs, opened the door and peered cautiously out.

When she saw who was there, she ran back, slammed the door and locked it.

Bob then heard her trying to arouse her sleeping nephews and them yawning and swearing.

The detective gave a vigorous knock at the door, but there was no other response than an increase in the already robust volume of profanity being poured forth in the room.

Then the sergeant took a turn, and banged the door with his night-stick.

But those inside refused to respond.

"Open the door!" he bawled. "Open it, or I'll break it down!"

"Do so at your peril!" came in a maudlin voice from the inside.

The policemen looked inquiringly at Bob.

"That is the only thing to be done," suggested the detective. "Smash it in."

"Here goes then," said the officer, and let drive with his night-stick with such vigor that the door was reduced to splinters in no time.

But when the door was open and the men marched in, there was no sign of resistance there. The two young men were crouched in a corner livid and trembling with fear. They were promptly handcuffed and marched to the police station. The little old woman was the only one that showed any spirit.

She also crouched in a corner, but she ex-

hibited no sign of fear. On the contrary, she was a perfect picture of defiance and hostility.

In one hand she grasped a revolver while her eyes glared like those of a caged tigress.

"Touch me if you dare!" she screamed in her thin, rasping voice. "I'll kill the first one that lays a hand upon me!"

And she looked as if she meant all she said.

Bob took no notice of her until he had handcuffed the two men and turned them over to the police.

Then, when they had been marched from the room, he turned his attention to her.

"So you refuse to be taken, do you?" he said in a calm voice.

"Yes," she snapped. "No living man shall put a hand on me! And if those cowardly nephews of mine had had half my spunk they would not have allowed themselves to be taken, either!"

"I guess you are right about that, old lady," smiled Bob. "It is undoubtedly true that they haven't your nerve, at all events. But what makes you think that I want to take you?"

"I know you do," she snarled.

"Then, you must feel that you are guilty of some crime?"

"No I don't."

"It is strange that you should think I want to arrest you, then."

"I know you do from the fact that you took them," she answered, showing unmistakable signs of weakening.

"I took them because I know them to be guilty of two awful crimes. But as I do not know positively that you are, I do not see why you should imagine that I want to arrest you. There is one thing I would like to ask you to do, however."

"What is that?" she asked, curiously.

"I would like to have you go down-stairs with me and help me to lay out that old man whom you—no, I mean whom the boys, murdered."

A strange change came over her features.

The expression of defiance changed for one of horror and repugnance.

"I had nothing to do with his death, sir," she said in a whispering voice. "Nor did they. The old man committed suicide. He has been threatening to do it for a long time, and now I suppose he has finally carried it out."

"You knew that he was dead, did you not?"

"Not until you spoke just now."

"That is strange," said Bob, in a musing tone. "I thought I understood you to say something about going down to turn the gas off awhile ago. I suppose I was mistaken."

The woman was about to reply, when she appeared suddenly to see something in the vicinity of the door that caused her to turn pale and hide her face.

Bob looked in the direction, and was astonished to see the little old man standing in the doorway.

Clad only in his long night-shirt and his face the color of chalk from his late asphyxiation, he looked enough like a ghost to have caused any one, much more his supposed murderess, to quail and shiver with terror.

"Go away!" screeched the terrified woman, still hiding her face in her apron. "It was they, and not I, that murdered you! My God! don't come near me with that face, Ezekiel. I had nothing to do with it!"

Meanwhile, the little old man was slowly and silently approaching the little old woman, and she kept up her lamentations and protestations of innocence.

Bob was a silent and interested spectator of the strange scene.

At length Masterson got up to within a foot or two of his sister, and then she ventured to look up, and, seeing him so close, uttered a piercing shriek.

"Go 'way!" she cried, frantically. "Why do you come back to me like that? I did not do it! I swear I didn't!" meanwhile covering her face again.

With a deliberate movement the little man grasped her hands and jerked them away from her face.

"Look at me, Barbara," he said, in a strange, unnatural, guttural tone. "Do I look like a ghost?"

She gazed at him with a terrified face, and did not speak.

"You think you killed me, Barbara," he went on, in a not unkindly voice, "but you did not. I am not dead. This is my living body you see. You tried to kill me, but you did not succeed. This gentleman came in in time to save my life, and you from being a murderer."

He paused, but she made no response, and he resumed:

"Yes, Barbara, you tried to murder me—you and the boys—and it is not the first time, as you very well know, but you came nearer succeeding this time than you ever did before. But I don't blame you. I never could. I deserve it, if ever a man did deserve killing. I have wronged you all, and your only chance for revenge—your only chance for justice—was to put the old imp out of the way. I don't blame you, but you've given me a scare this time that makes me feel like doing the right thing in future. Promise not to attempt to put me out of the way any more, and you shall all have your rights."

The little old woman looked up with a puzzled countenance.

"Do you really mean it?" she ventured timidly.

"I do," he replied firmly. "Before this day is out—if I live, I shall sign over to you and our four nephews all the property I have kept you out of so long."

The little woman looked up with an expression of joy and gratitude, but at that moment her eyes fell upon the detective, and her expression changed for one of sorrow.

"It is too late, Ezekiel," she murmured sadly. "too late."

"Why too late?" he questioned eagerly.

"Because all four of the boys are in jail ere this for the crime of blowing up the mill and attempting to murder you, and I shall be there before long. This young man is just waiting to take me."

"The mill is not blown up, madam," interposed Thad.

"Is it not?" cried the old man eagerly.

"No, I have prevented it for the second time."

"Thank God!" ejaculated the old man. "Then, at least Morris and Lester are innocent of any crime, and—and—as you did not succeed in killing me, and I sha'n't prosecute you—"

Here he paused and looked very hard at the detective.

"Young man," he resumed, "will it be necessary for you to push this case against my folks?"

"I do not see how I can help myself," rejoined Bob. "The fact that they failed to kill you does not alter the case materially. It does not alter the fact that their intention was to murder you, and because I happened in in the nick of time to save you from death does not detract from their crime, that I can see. My duty cannot be shirked simply because you are too soft-hearted to prosecute these would-be assassins."

"But, if you knew how I have persecuted them, and how richly I deserved death at their hands, you would change your opinion," muttered the old man, tearfully.

"It might change my opinion, but it could not change my sense of duty. I promise this much, however, to state the case as I have just learned it, which may lighten their sentences, or even secure their acquittal.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" cried the old man, grasping his hand warmly. "Tell them that old Ezekiel Masterson got possession of some property belonging to his sister and four nephews and got rich out of it, while they were beggared, and it was only through this desperate means that they were enabled to secure their rights."

"I promise," said Bob, solemnly.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" he cried again. "And you shall be well paid for the services you have rendered in this case."

"And you have my heartfelt thanks," uttered the little old woman, coming forward and taking his hand. "I am ready to go with you, sir."

It was the severest trial of his young life that he was compelled to take the poor, persecuted old creature to prison, but he consoled himself with the thought that her sentence would be light after all the facts were known.

But, as it transpired, the poor creature never had the mortification of coming to trial.

She was admitted to bail, and, returning home that afternoon, went directly to bed, from which she never arose.

The shock had been too much for her.

As for the four wronged young men, after the little old man got up and made the most touching appeal in their behalf ever heard in a court of justice, in which he showed himself to be one of the blackest scoundrels that ever went unbung, the jury was not long in finding a verdict of not guilty, and Bowery Bob was made a hero by the whole family, and rewarded beyond his wildest expectations.

Old Stryker was less fortunate, however.

His record was against him, and he was given another term in the penitentiary.

It was an attempt on Masterson's life, near Greenpoint, some years previous, that had sent him to the penitentiary before. Jimmie Firrand and the others each received short sentences.

THE END.

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